The Future of the Printed Book in the Information Society /

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Abstract

Books and reading books are an integral part of the academic life of students and especially of researchers. The book is first and foremost a vehicle for imparting information and knowledge. It is a cultural tool that has undergone many changes since its inception. Initially the book was in the form of stone and clay tablets, later followed by papyrus and parchment scrolls, and finally the codex evolved, that is, for all intents and purposes, the modern book. Every new form that appeared during the developmental stages of the book was created in order to improve and streamline existing technology. The solutions were intended primarily fro the storing and preserving of information. The papyrus scrolls, for example, could hold a greater volume of information than the clay tablets. The material from which books were fashioned changed over the years, from writing on stone, clay, papyrus, parchment and paper. In time books became lighter physically, allowing the books to be more widely distributed. Later the codex was invented with the aim o f solving the problems of reading and the cumbersome preoccupation of rolling the scrolls. Another stage in the book's evolution, which some call the fourth stage, is that of the electronic book. The notion of an "electronic book" is a general term for different kinds of books in electronic form: a computerized text, CD-ROM, laptops, or e-book tools. Since the invention of the computer and the appearance of the internet in the sixties, we sense the accelerated process of the digitalization of documents. We are exposed to electronic texts in the various frameworks of our lives: at work, while studying and for our personal needs.

One of the primary fields exposed in great degree to electronic texts is the research-academic field. Research shows that there is greater use of electronic documents and texts amongst students and researchers. However, electronic texts are not the sole preserve of academic research. Nowadays, free-lance professionals, such

as analysts and lawyers are exposed to and even use electronic texts in the course of their professional work.

This paper examines the future of the printed book among students and researchers. The principal research questions examine what constitute the main kinds of books read by the research subjects, what is their preferred reading format, whether the research subjects believe there is a future in reading printed books in the information society and what will be the status of the e-book and in what fields.

As has previously been stated, the research included two research populations: students from three main faculties at Bar-Ilan University (humanities, social and natural sciences), and also a group of fourteen researchers and professionals from various professions. The research instruments used were semi-structured questionnaires and interviews, which were composed expressly to answer the questions of the research. 200 anonymous questionnaires were distributed to the student population, while among the researchers semi-structured personal interviews were held. In order to answer the research questions, the findings were divided, during the data-processing, into the following subtopics: reading habits, preferred reading format, the future of the printed book and the status of the e-book. Among the students following the differences among the three faculties were also examined. The analysis of the questionnaires was carried out by means of the following categorical variables: gender, faculty, degree and years of study.

Generally one can say that in one opinion of the two groups of research subjects, there is a future for the printed book in the information society. The electronic book will not replace the printed book, but will be used as an aide and thus both formats of the book will exist one complementing the other. The findings show that students and researchers read research literature in printed format and prefer this format to the electronic format. There is a preference for printing texts in electronic format. However, short electronic texts are read directly from the screen. In addition, the group of research subjects had a high appreciation for the survival of the printed book in the information society. In their view, the paper book will continue to exist, and since the electronic book cannot be used as a book for everything, apparently they will never replace it. Nevertheless, most of the research subjects were for encouraging

Library of Information Science הספריה ללימודי מידע Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel 52900 אוניברסיטת בר-אילן, רמת גן, ישראל Websitewww.is.biu.ac.il/library Email: Ruthi.Tshop@mail.biu.ac.il Tel. 972-3-5318163 טל. the preservation of the printed book and improving its image. The group of research

subjects reckons that the e-book has a future, especially within an academic

framework. Nevertheless, the research subjects do not think that the e-book will

replace the traditional book. In their opinion, the e-book will enrich the traditional

book and will be adapted to a certain class of books, such as books are frequently

updated (advisory literature - dictionaries and encyclopedias), and thus the two

formats will be integrated. There were differences between the three faculties.

Research subjects who dealt most of the time with computers had a more positive

approach towards the computerization of texts and books compared to those that did

not. As for reading books this group of research subjects read less than subjects who

did not deal with computers.

Nowadays, the status of the book is stable, and not threatened by the e-book.

Nevertheless, it is advisable to invest resources in improving the status of the printed

book. For this end, it is advisable to make use of innovative marketing techniques,

and also to continue developing the topic of educating young people to read books. In

addition, it is recommended to invest in the development of e-books for the purpose

of study and research. Concentrating on a particular genre of literature, such as

research literature, manuals and advisory books, will not constitute a threat to the

printed book.

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