The Reading Motivations Scale: Uses and Gratifications of Readers, with Implications for Marketers

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Abstract

Numerous studies have explored the uses and gratifications (U&G) consumers experience when watching television and using the Internet, but little has been done to understand these phenomena with regard to reading books. In this study an established U&G scale for television viewing was adapted for books and reading. A sample of 266 persons tested the scale, with Partial least Squares (PLS) being performed on the data. Results showed there are four factors governing book uses and gratifications, accounting for 72% of the variance. Based on these findings, implications for book marketers are drawn to help publishers and authors increase sales.

Target Marketing to Reader Uses and Gratifications

Books have long been a mainstay in society, yet have largely been neglected in research. Although many have predicted the decline of print media, e-readers have allowed for a resurgence in book purchases, albeit in technology form. In fact, it is probably one of the hardiest debates on media choice currently as users determine whether they are willing to trade the tactile enjoyment of handling books in a book store for the convenience that e-readers provide. Additionally, books are the impetus not only for movies, as they long have been, but television shows as well. Thus, books might often be the reason viewers tune into a program in the first place. Furthermore, books might carry influence in ways unintended by the author. Take for example the best selling phenomenon of *Eat, Pray, Love*, by Elizabeth Gilbert. It is a memoir of her personal journey toward recovery after a bitter divorce and loss of self. Gilbert eats her way through Italy, prays for spiritual awakening in India, and finds love in Indonesia; and ultimately turns her memoir into a bestselling book in both travel and religion (Amazon.com). Clearly readers used the book as more than entertainment. This study serves to explore reading motivations to provide insights into the marketing of books (Rubin, 1983).

Rationale

Reading is a hobby holding fast despite the rumored death of print. E-readers in particular are showing the importance of books, and the debate over "real" and "virtual" books is testing the longevity of bookstores. Over 10.3 million e-readers are in the hands of avid readers buying up 100 million e-books, a 70% increase in e-book purchase and 64% increase in e-reader ownership from the previous year (Richtel & Miller, 2010). Despite the fact that books have been around far longer than television, radio, and the Internet, reading motivations have been overlooked and underrepresented in media effects research.

Understanding reader motives can further enhance targeted marketing efforts. "The uses and gratifications paradigm has proven helpful in identifying a variety of motives regarding media use and viewing patterns that reflect the utility, selectivity and intentionality of audience activity" (Ebersole & Woods, 2007, p. 24). Similar to research in television, it can be assumed that book choices are based on particular user goals but as of yet, research has neglected reader motivations and the marketing implications. This research serves to extend what is understood about viewer motivations into the realm of reader motivations as they relate to books.

Typical television viewers fall into the categories of ritualized or instrumental media orientations. "An instrumental orientation reflects audience utility (i.e., motivation), intention, and selectivity. A ritualized orientation reflects utility but less intention, selection, and attention" (Rubin, 1993, p. 99). Viewers with a ritualized orientation turn to television for relaxation and entertainment while those with an instrumental orientation seek a more informational purpose. It is likely that the motivations of book users fall into similar categories. Understanding these categories can help in creating messages that specifically target the uses and gratifications of readers. A study focused on ritualized and instrumental media orientations did find that traditional media use, such as reading books, tended to be ritualistic (Metzger & Flanagin, 2002); however, reading of books was clustered with other media, so turning to books alone is warranted.

The influence of books in other media consumption makes the correction of the oversight of reading motivations all the more critical. Books intersect with media in the values we hold, the interests we gain, and the stories we navigate. Sedo noted:

We find ourselves at a unique moment in media history when the internet, radio and television converge with the printed book, but little is known of how this media convergence influences readers' negotiation of cultural taste hierarchies, and what role interpersonal contacts play in these negotiations. (2003, p. 189)

We believe this foray into the uses and gratifications of book reading is a first step in further understanding both the cultural influence of books and the interactions that facilitate that influence.

In addition to cultural influences, the implications for further research into the value of books across society are something that cannot be ignored. Although outside the purview of this study, digging into user motivations could lead us to ask important questions in future research about the uses and gratifications of societal segments, such as children's literature. Furthermore, the

decline of reading rates in American youth is detrimental to their success, so identifying motivations for reading could benefit programmatic efforts at increasing habitual reading and book buying behaviors.

Literature Review

Important to this research is recognizing the influence of books to justify their place as a medium worth studying in media effects research and the potential for targeting marketing messages. We start by looking at the cultural and historical influence of books and then address the current direction of uses and gratifications with the intention of linking the medium and theory.

Influence of books

The National Endowment for the Arts conducted a study, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007), as a follow-up to *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (2004). Important to this study, is the finding that "the number of books in a home is a significant predictor of academic achievement" (NEA, 2007, p. 11). Increased reading increased the probability of competing in the job market. Furthermore, "literary readers are more than 3 times as likely as non-readers to visit museums, attend plays or concerts, and create artworks of their own" (p. 18) and they tend to volunteer more in their communities. In the executive summary, the chairman, Dana Gioia, noted:

Reading correlates with nearly every measurement of positive personal and social behavior surveyed. It is reassuring, though hardly amazing, that readers attend more concerts and theater than non-readers, but it is surprising that they exercise more and play more sports – no matter what their education level. The cold statistics confirm something that most readers know but have mostly been reluctant to declare as fact – boks change lives for the better. (NEA, 2007, p. 6)

The influence of books is clear and ignoring the importance of reading is detrimental. Although the report showed a decline in readership and book purchases, the data collected were prior to the upswing in e-reader and e-book purchases. It is possible that this trend could be altered by electronic reading formats, something that is handy for tech-savvy youth.

The NEA report stressed the importance of books and their positive impact on our lives. Said noted:

We tend to forget how the culture of book reading in nearly every civilization known to our planet once entailed a vast cumulative structure of other human activities, from prayer, to love-making, to school instruction, to decoration, and silent meditation. Far from being an inert object scattered throughout the house or library the book was, and to many people still is, a site of extraordinary human richness and significance as well as an icon of so much experience on every level as to be in effect a continent within the overall structures of our collective lives. (2001, p. 12)

Said further noted that books can serve as means for emancipation and enlightenment but also have the potential to be used as justification for oppression and abuse. Books can influence our lives in both positive and negative ways depending on intent and motivations. Yet, they remain a

neglected part of the corpus of communication research. Even literature examining magazine usage from a uses and gratifications perspective is scarce (Zuo, 2005).

However, we ran across one uses and gratifications study on repeated exposure of media, including books. Although readers do not often re-read books, they are more likely to do so with "suspenseful, solemn, or profound" books (Hoffman, 2006, p. 393). Re-reading books is largely because we know the gratifications we obtained in the first reading. Thus, we purposely pick up a book to reread because we are seeking gratifications we know we will get from the particular text. It might follow that repeated exposure also fulfills a desire for a vicarious exposure by having others read the book; we want friends to read the books we enjoy and children to read books with which we grew up.

Additionally, repeat exposure to our favorite books can be a "social experience" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 394), which likely explains the popularity of book clubs. We can repeat and share the obtained gratifications. Further, book clubs are themselves taking on a technological bent as broadcast version book clubs and their respective websites become spaces for "negotiating cultural taste and acquiring cultural capital" (Sedo, 2003, p. 189). We likely could find that motivations to read revolve around the communities we form and the discussions we formulate. In fact, it is not uncommon to see books marketed as a good book club choice. We turn now to a review of uses and gratifications historically and its use in reading motivations.

Uses and Gratifications

Early media effects research, and in particular Blumler and Katz (1974), envisioned uses and gratifications research as movement away from exploring what media do to users and toward what users do with media (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1983). The essential tenets of the theory are to identify the motivations for using particular media and the gratifications both expected and obtained by the users (Perse, 2004). Years of research have produced a long list of motivations corresponding with a variety of media, but books are less flashy, and have been pushed to the side in favor of more modern and technologically advanced media.

Uses and gratifications research acknowledges that the user actively and intentionally selects media based on "our psychological and social environment, our needs and motives to communicate, our attitudes and expectations about the media, functional alternatives to using the media, our communication behavior, and the outcomes or consequences of our behavior" (Rubin, 2002, p. 527). Individuals "are often more influential in the selection process" (p. 531) rather than just passive users of media. This is likely especially true of reading as book purchases are generally specific to needs, interests, or group membership. Additionally, media use is tied to preexisting norms and values (Blumler, 1979; Abelman, 2006), which we suspect would be particularly pronounced among avid readers.

Uses and gratifications scales have been adapted for various media uses including television, newspapers, internet, and even specific television genres such as reality and sports programming (Armfield, Dixon, & Dougherty, 2006; Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1983; Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). Repeated use and adaptation of the scales has led researchers to a variety of gratifications including Rubin's initial factors: learning, habit/pass time, companionship, escape, arousal, and relaxation (Rubin, 2002, p. 531). Several researchers have added factors, including

Ruggiero (2000) who added surveillance, entertainment/diversion, interpersonal utility, and parasocial interaction (see also Rubin, 2002). The added factors could take on different dimensions when considering reader motivations, but it is also possible that reading brings gratifications not found with other forms of media.

Books in Uses and Gratifications Research

Audience activity in media choice has long been an important component of uses and gratifications research (Levy & Windahl, 1984). Turning to books allows us to focus more deeply on intentionality since users have to actively purchase the books of interest at a store or internet site unlike the newspaper showing up at the door or changing the television channel. Often entertainment choices can occur "rather mindlessly" (Zillman, 1985, p. 228), but we argue that books require more intentional choice because we are less likely to pick up a book just because it is there. Further, books allow us to read ahead, skip chapters, and peak at the ending, which is rarely an option for other mediums.

Clearly, reading is a different activity from watching television; it is more purposive in that books are sought from and purchased via stores and online vendors, whereas television content can be accessed by channel surfing. There is also a paucity of research regarding the motives readers demonstrate when purchasing books. While television viewing motives have been studied extensively with a well-established scale, little or no work has been done to study book reading motives. We thus ask the following:

RQ1: What are the motives readers have for reading books?

RQ2: What are the marketing implications of reader motivation?

As we expand the interest and focus of reading motivations, we also want to examine how marketers and publishers can increase sales of books in both traditional and electronic markets.

Method

In Spring 2011, data were collected using an online survey created with the Qualtrics survey software. The survey was administered to individuals 18 or older who self identified as avid readers, exemplified by the fact that the average number of books read per year was 17.3. Participants were solicited via the authors' Facebook accounts and a communication electronic mailing list attempting to reach a wide variety of demographics. A total of 266 usable surveys were submitted (roughly one-third male, two-thirds female). The average age was in the low-30s, and about 80% of respondents identified as Caucasian. The sample was a highly educated one, with slightly over one-half reporting holding an undergraduate degree or higher. About one-half of respondents indicated having an annual household income of \$50,000 or higher.

The Survey of Reading Preferences was deployed using the Qualtrics online research suite. The online survey functioned equally well from desktop or mobile devices; the Facebook and email appeals could thus be launched anywhere rather than having to wait until returning to a desktop computer. The survey consisted of the Reading Motives Scale (RMS), which is our adapted version of the Television Viewing Motives Scale (Rubin, 1983; see Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). Basic demographic information was collected (age, gender, ethnicity, education, etc.); participants were also asked to indicate how many books they read, on average, each year.

We began with the nine areas of uses and gratifications identified in Rubin's adapted scale for reading: relaxation, companionship, habit, pass time, entertainment, social interaction, information, arousal, and escape. The Television Viewing Motivation scale is considered to be reliable, as have other adapted versions. Since reading and watching television are two very different activities (i.e., one that is solo vs. one that can easily be done in a group), it was necessary to make adaptations to some of the items. Words that did not fit reading behavior were altered, and two items that were specific to television viewing were eliminated.

The resulting 25-item Reading Motives Scale (RMS) is an adaptation of Rubin's (1983) Television Viewing Motives Scale (TVMS), which was derived from Greenberg's (1974) seminal work. In the online format, the scale took about 4 minutes to complete. All statements were written in the affirmative voice, presented as Likert statements, and contained in a matrix; participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement regarding their reasons for reading: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The use of different response categories is found throughout the literature (Babrow, 1988), as is random or systematic ordering of the statements. The items in our RMS appeared in the same order as they did in Rubin's adaptation.

Results

A preliminary analysis of the data using Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis showed the scale to be both reliable and valid. While these tools verified the value of the instrument, questions remained about the relationships between the factor and participant education level, and the number of books read per year. Specifically, we wished to determine not only what factors exist in a theoretical sense, but also the importance of those factors in influencing reading behaviors.

The factor analyses generated four factors with eigenvalues above 1.0 (Relaxation, Passing Time, Sharing/Learning and Escape); these four factors accounted for 72% of the variance. Of the 25 factors with which we started (see Table 1), 16 were retained with factor loadings over .50 (seven items to Relaxation, and three to each of the remaining factors).

The Partial Least Squares (PLS) structural equation modeling technique (Wold, 1985), which we report herein, was then used to determine the relationships between the four factors and education level (the independent variables), against the dependent variable, number of books read per year. Summated scores of the four factors were calculated; the educational level variable was inversely coded (from PhD down to grammar school). We included the education variable because of support in the literature linking it to reading behavior.

PLS has been growing in popularity since the seminal work of Wold, Sambanurthy and Chinn (1994) and Sosik, *et al*, (1997), who maintain that PLS is well-suited for smaller samples, as well as regressions in which one or more of the variables is not intervally scaled.

PLS is particularly robust in these instances because it does not make assumptions about data distributions, independence of observations, or variable scaling. Techniques like multiple

regression and LISREL require multivariate normality, interval scaled data, and large sample sizes. Thus, PLS is a particularly useful technique in situations such as this study.

The outputs of a PLS are little different from those of standardized multiple regression coefficients. These coefficients can thus be used to measure the relationships between the constructs (see Figure 1). The PLS showed all five independent variables to be significant at the p=0.05 level. The Average Variance Explained of the four summated factors varied between .68 and .78. Cronbach's alphas for the four factors ranged from .70 to .93. Finally, the R-Square of the regression was 0.1955 (see Table 2).

Discussion

The PLS analysis affirmed what the EFA and CFA produced, namely that there were not only four factors underlying reading behaviors, but that each of them were significant predictors of the same. Education level was also affirmed as a significant predictor. Directionality was consistent in that the betas for the four factors were positive, while the beta for education was negative for an inversely-scaled variable (effectively, a positive relationship).

The analysis also showed that of the four factors, Passing Time and Relaxation were the biggest contributors to reading behavior. While these two factors may initially appear to be different measures of the same thing, they are in fact quite different. The latter refers to the use of books as a positive means of spending one's leisure time, whereas the former is a coping mechanism to help alleviate boredom. In other words, reading can be situation-specific.

The other two factors (Escape and Sharing/Learning) were also significant predictors, albeit at lower levels. These, too, are very different from the first two factors discussed above, not just pairwise, but also against one another. The types of books that would be used for Escape are likely to differ considerably from those used for Learning.

That the betas for these factors are significant, yet vary considerably, suggests that reading behavior is a multifaceted phenomenon. Marketers would thus be wise to consider the type of book when crafting an advertising campaign for a title. Furthermore, the first two factors pertain more to time usage, while the latter two pertain more to a cognitive process. Thus, the first two might be appealed to directly by marketers seeking to promote reading in general, whereas the latter two would more likely to be dependent upon the type of book being promoted.

While the findings above provide insight and help resolve the Research Questions posed, there are limitations to the study, as well as opportunities for future research. The current study represents but one snapshot in time, with data collected both on a college campus as well as through a limited Facebook appeal. The RMS needs to be tested with different samples, with the aim of gaining not only more participants, but also a more diverse sample. Replication of the current findings is needed before a general theory of reading motives can be developed.

There is need for assessing differences in reading motives based on singular as well as complex demographic groupings (e.g., gender differences as well as age/gender or other combinations). It is possible that, for example, older readers read for very different reasons than do younger readers. Furthermore, there may be differences between younger females and older females. A

much larger sampling effort will allow for these finer distinctions to be studied. Finally, a cross-cultural study may yield particularly interesting insights into what motivates reading behaviors among people of different national and ethnic backgrounds.

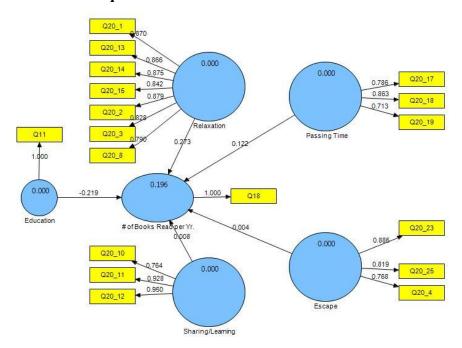
Table 1: The Reading Motives Scale Instrument

Statement Number	Statement		
1	I read books because it relaxes me		
2	I read books because it allows me to unwind		
3	read books because it is a pleasant rest		
4	read books to keep me company		
5	I read books when there is no one else to talk or be with		
6	I read books because they make me feel less lonely		
7	I read books just because they are there		
8	I read books because I just like to		
9	I read books because it is a habit, just something to do		
10	I read books when I have nothing better to do		
11	I read books because it passes the time, particularly when I am bored		
12	I read books because it gives me something to do to occupy my time		
13	I read books because it entertains me		
14	I read books because it is enjoyable		
15	I read books because it amuses me		
16	I read books so I can talk with others about the stories		
17	I read books so I can share stories with other family members or friends		
18	I read books because it helps me learn things about myself and others		
19	I read books so I can learn how to do things which I haven't done before		
20	I read books because it is thrilling		
21	I read books because it is exciting		
22	I read books because it peps me up		
23	I read books so I can forget about work, school or other things		
24	I read books so I can get away from the rest of the family or others		
25	I read books so that I can get away from what I am doing		

Table 2: PLS Summary Statistics

Independent Variable	Beta Coefficients	Average Variance	Cronbach's Alpha
		Explained	
Education Level	-0.2188	1	1
Escape	0.004	0.6812	0.7655
Passing Time	0.122	0.6238	0.7043
Relaxation	0.273	0.7238	0.9362
Sharing/Learning	0.0077	0.7825	0.8748

Figure 1: Partial Least Squares Model



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Marc Sollosy is an Instructor of Management and Marketing at West Texas A&M University primarily teaching principles of management, principles of marketing, and strategic management. He is currently pursuing his doctorate (DBA) in Management with a focus in Strategy at Kennesaw State University. Prior to joining the faculty at West Texas A&M, he had a 30 plus year career in the financial services industry, principally as an Information Technology and Operations Executive. His research interests include; assurance of learning, marketing orientation, and strategy, particularly strategic intent, innovation and Intrapreneurship/entrepreneurship orientation.