

“Japanese Patterns of Participation in Cultural and Media-related Activities”

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Using two groups of samples, this investigation looks into the patterns of interaction between reading books, as a communications media, and various modes of cultural behaviour such as theater, concerts, museums and attending lectures. Active reading (at least one book one month) correlates highly with traditionally called “high culture” activities such as theater, concerts, museums and other socio-cultural activities such as lectures. Background factors such as age, level and length of formal schooling were found to be essential in this relationship. The findings can be used to link reading research to the long controversy concerning the heirarchization of cultural activities (Berger, 1986) and the interrelation between “high” and “popular” or “mass” culture.

Reading as Traditional Literacy

Literacy, in its broad sense, refers to a wide range of reading and writing skills. Definitions of literacy has undergone a dramatic change for more than the past 50 years (Adoni, 1995). In several historical studies (Cipolla, 1969) literacy was measured by the ability to sign one’s name on important documents. The levels of literacy in various social groups were measured by standard literacy tests. Reading ability tests were often linked with the number of years of schooling: for each grade there was an accepted standard of reading ability (Adoni, 1995). Several uses and functions of literacy were used by Heath (1983) for anthropological studies of several communities in the United States. Some of these were: reading for instrumental, practical goals, news-related reading, confirmational reading (of religious and political pamphlets) and social-interactive/recreational reading (as in the case of reading magazines and novels).

The term literacy in this study was based on the basic definition of Kaestle (1991) : “the ability to decode and comprehend written language at a rudimentary level. Operationally, reading is defined in a very general sense as the occasional reading of a book,

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newspaper or magazine.

This study draws the distinction between occasional reading of printed material, referred to as active reading: that is, reading books regularly, and reading as a cultural activity.

Reading and Other Types of Media Consumption

The fate of books and reading in the modern and postmodern period is integral to the ongoing debate on modern mass culture (Adoni, 1995). In 1951, Inis argued that civilizations have been shaped by their use of a particular medium of communication over a lengthy period. Inis assumed that a dominant communication medium in any given period is eventually replaced by another that better copes with the problems of communication knowledge through time and space. This sparked the controversy over the use of books and other printed materials. McLuhan (1962) explored changes brought about by the invention of printing and social transformations caused and anticipated by the widespread use of electronic media. He predicted that the linear segmented print medium would be displaced by television, which offers a shared experience and enables the homogenization of cultural consumption. More recent studies focused on the effects of various media regardless of their content. For instance, Postman (1982) and Meyrowitz (1985) focus on television, analyzing its primary effects on the socialization pattern of children and youth who had greater access to information previously limited to adult newspaper readers. On the other hand, Neumann (1991) demonstrated from her study that the effects of television on reading have been grossly exaggerated to the point of being an accepted myth. He analyzed a "spirited interplay" between various media that demands young people to develop the capacity to use the different media optimally.

The consumption of mass media is seen as an active process in which individuals attempt to satisfy some of their needs by selective exposure to specific media. Empirical studies also indicated that although several media can cater to the same psychological needs, a functional division exists among the various communications media, each specializing in certain types of needs. For instance, reading books has been found to be conducive to meeting cognitive needs related to study, expanding one's knowledge, and satisfying one's curiosity. In several studies (Adoni, 1995), respondents also report that reading books help satisfy their own need for aesthetic experience.

Whereas some communications media, particularly books, tend to fulfill more specific needs, television was found to be the most diffuse medium, capable of serving

numerous psychological needs. The relationship between television and the print media has been noted as one of functional interchangeability and not of substitution and displacement. Other studies indicated however that the degree of functional interchangeability between books and television is low. Each of these medium apparently specializes in satisfying different needs, although some degree of interchangeability does exist with regard to entertainment content (Adoni, 1985; Katz and Adoni, 1973; Neuman, 1980)

It is noteworthy that need satisfaction by means of communication media is a dynamic process for both adults and young people. The developmental needs of children and adolescents vary among different age groups and can be fulfilled by different media. For instance Newman (1991) reported that television and books gratify similar needs in different periods of young people's lives.

Reading as a Cultural Capital and Social Status

One common finding of the numerous studies conducted in different countries and subcultures defined by one or more background variables (for example: age, gender, ethnicity, education, and other criteria) is that the level of education is the main factor in determining the frequency of reading and the choice of reading material (Dumazdier, 1967). The higher the level of education, more time is devoted to reading as a cultural activity and the more books are read per year. It has also been shown (Adoni, 1985) that other demographic factors and socio economic factors such as age (younger people tend to read more) and gender (women generally read more books, men read more newspapers) determine reading habits. These latter factors, are much less significant than years of schooling because, in contrast to the consumption of audiovisual media, in order to enjoy reading as a cultural activity, one must acquire basic literacy skills. Level of education is also linked to the qualitative and functional aspects of reading activity. People with higher level of education read more sophisticated and complex reading materials, and reading fulfills more psychological needs than it does for those with less education (Katz and Gurevitch, 1973). Considerable evidence indicates however, that although years of schooling can be considered a major factor in developing rudimentary ability to read, it is not the sole factor in the development of reading as a cultural activity.

Studies conducted in the West (Watt, 1967 and Hoggart, 1957) indicate that social class and status are major predictors of the scope and frequency of reading and may determine reading preferences in terms of literary genres and the level of reading material. Alitick (1957) and Hoggart (1957) noted that people from lower social strata used literacy

for functional purposes of community life and for reading popular literature and magazines.

One central issue addressed in the present study is the extent to which reading patterns are dependent on the cultural capital acquired by the individual at an early age in the informal setting of family home and status group. Do people who belong to different social groups display different reading patterns in terms of frequency, content, genres, complexity levels, and functional aspects?

This study is based on the notion that the status of each medium and related cultural behaviour, in this case reading books, must be examined in the context of the total media environment. Any study on reading habits and reading behaviour in the post modern media environment, particularly toward the end of the 1990's, must be conducted in the context of other communication media and other patterns of cultural behaviour.

This issue links reading research to the long controversy concerning the heirarchization of cultural activities (Berger, 1986) and the interrelation between "high" and "popular" or "mass" culture. It is beyond the scope of this study to present an extensive discussion of this issue, yet is essential to point to the special status of reading in an attempt to define the complexity level of various cultural activities. Start another pavagraph in the second part of the 20th century, reading at a rudimentary level has already become a skill mastered by the vast majority of people in the West. Yet the fact that people can read does not necessarily make them active and selective readers for whom reading books is significant part of their leisure and life.

In his analysis of the development of cultural institutions in 19th-century Boston, DiMaggio (1982) argues that in order to achieve and maintain high social status, wealthy elites sought a new definition of artistic and cultural activities that excluded undemanding leisure activities, light music, and unsophisticated visual arts. In her classification of fine art and popular art, Zolberg (1990) includes serious novels, nonfiction, poetry and literary criticism under the first label with whom people from higher social strata are familiar with, and popular literary material which people from lower social strata tend to consume.

Conflicting Approaches to Literacy and Reading

The studies of literacy and reading in various societies and social groups mentioned above indicate two rival sets of hypotheses: the technological deterministic study of culture and the sociofunctional approach to media study. According to the technologi-

cal approach, technological factors are far more influential in producing culture change than social factors. Adoni (1995) noted this in his findings on the changes in reading pattern and culture of Israeli society. In a society characterized by a rapid rise in educational level and a rapidly expanding communication environment, the following changes are expected: (a) decrease on the scope of the reading public and in the frequency of their reading; (b) a negative correlation between reading and the use of visual and computerized media, such as TV, cable television, VCR's and computers; (c) decrease in the ability of books and newspapers to fulfill the various psychological needs of individuals; (d) minimal differentiation in reading habits between various social groups, both in terms of frequency of reading and content and complexity level. The rival set of hypotheses, based on functional and technological approaches to media study predict that the new electronic media will not displace the traditional print media. Rather it will create a new functional division of labor between the system's components.

Meanwhile, the sociofunctional approach to media study claims that powerful social factors strongly influence changes in cultural scene. Accordingly, the following changes in cultural behavior are predicted: (a) stability in both the scope of the reading public and in the frequency of their reading; (b) interrelations between print and electronic media, determined by the level of each activity or the required amount of cultural capital (a negative correlation between reading and the use of electronic media is not essential); (c) little or no change in the ability of print media to fulfill various psychosocial needs; (d) differentiation among various social groups, since reading habits depend mainly on the level of schooling and patterns of socialization in the family environment. Even if the frequency of reading is affected by competition with other media, people with more education and greater cultural capital as a consequence of "correct" socialization will still use more print media than others.

Methodology:

Data were collected from a questionnaire distributed to the two groups of samples: 60 university students within the age range of 18-23, and adult -working- respondents whose age range was 25-55.

A distinction was drawn between general and active reading. General reading was measured operationally by asking respondents: "Do you sometimes read books?" Only respondents who answered positively were asked about various aspects of their reading habits.

Three main aspects of reading as a cultural activity were examined: quantitative, qualitative and functional. Quantitative refers to how much people read and how reading frequently interacts with the frequency of other cultural activities. Qualitative

refers to what people read in terms of literary genres and complexity level. Functional refers to why people read : that is, what psychosocial needs are fulfilled by reading. Each aspect was defined by several indicators (Adoni, 1995).

The quantitative dimension was measured by : (a) general reading (1 to 11 books per year) versus active reading (at least one book per month) ; (b) occasional newspaper reading (a few times per week) ; (c) regular newspaper reading (everyday or almost everyday), and (d) magazine reading.

Social desirability was measured in part by asking about reading habits in different parts of the questionnaire and by formulating the questions differently. For example : “Did you read a book last month?” and “Approximately how many books do you read per year?”

Respondents were also asked about the frequency of their participation in other cultural activities such as museums, cinemas, classical music concerts, rock music concerts, lectures, voluntary organizations, study and conference trips, radio and television, computers, and video and computer games. For some other activities, more detailed questions were asked, but the data are not pertinent to this discussion.

In the first part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked how frequently they made use of the above media. Only respondents who used these media at least occasionally were asked about the ways in which these media fulfill various psychosocial needs. Two other measures of cultural capital were also used in the present study : years of schooling and the reading habits of the respondent’s parents. Other variables such as : gender, age, degree of religious observance and ethnic affiliation were used as background references.

The qualitative aspect of reading, which refers to the frequency with which various literary genres were read, and the complexity of reading level of books read, is still under the process of investigation.

The functional aspect of reading was examined by means of uses and gratifications methodology, used by Adoni (1993) to assess the functions of various mass media for the individual. Data were collected in two consequent parts of the questionnaire. Respondents were presented with a list of media-related needs and asked to state how important each was to them. They were then asked to assess the relative contribution of several mass media books, magazines, newspapers, television, radio and cinema in satisfying these needs. The second battery of questions was only administered to those respondents who defined their needs as being “somewhat important” or “very important”. One main measure of cultural capital was used in this study : years of schooling, while age and gender were taken into account as independent background variables.

It was noted earlier that it is impossible to study reading habits without relating them to other forms of cultural behavior, particularly television viewing. These interrelations were examined with Pearson correlations (Table 1) and a SmallestSpace Analysis (SSA) map representing the interrelations between various types of cultural behaviour, including reading and television (Fig. 1).

Based on previous studies concerning various approaches to popular culture (DiMaggio, 1985 ; Zolberg, 1990) and studies of leisure behavior (Neuman, 1986) it was hypothesized that the main facets relevant to the structure of cultural activities are : : (a) media type (audio, audiovisual, print, live); (b) the site of the activities (inside the home, outside the home or both); (c) required level of cultural capital (high or low). The following mapping sentence was formulated, replicating Adoni's model (1995) :

Respondent (x) is engaged in :

- * audio
- * audiovisual
- * print
- * other

cultural activities requiring :

- * high cultural capital
- * low cultural capital

taking place :

- * inside the home
- * outside the home

with :

- * high frequency
- * low frequency

SSA produces geometric representations (maps) of the input correlation matrix, whereby the distance between any two variables, represented by points in space, is the inverse magnitude of the correlation between them (Guttman, 1968). In the SSA procedure, the expected partitioning of the space of the map is determined by the researcher according to a priori theoretical hypotheses.

Discussion of Results :

The Pearson correlations between reading and other types of cultural behaviour show that the frequency of reading is positively correlated with various activities that are generally defined as highbrow (Zolberg, 1990) and that require high cultural capital.

These activities include theater, concerts, museums, lectures and movies. The weak interaction between television viewing and reading is clear from the examination of the interrelations between various cultural activities.

Empirical distribution of the examined variables in the SSA map (Figure 1) shows that the map is divided according to the two facets defined in the mapping sentence. The horizontal division is according to the first facet (high/low cultural capital). Cultural activities requiring high cultural capital are concentrated in the lower part of the map ; those requiring low cultural capital are concentrated in the upper part.

Several activities are found in the center of the map, forming a border between the upper and lower parts. These activities including sports, movies, trips, newspapers, and video and computer games, are related to both areas. Theater, museums, concerts and lectures as well as various reading activities are clearly concentrated in the high cultural capital zone, as is the use of personal computers. It is noteworthy that some activities, such as computer use and concerts are frequent among younger age groups, whereas others, such as visits to the museums, lectures are common among the older age group.

The second facet, the site of the cultural activities (whether inside the home, outside the home, or both) divides the map into three main vertical zones : most of the activities are done at home, and therefore concentrated in the left zone ; the middle zone includes activities done outside of the home ; and the right zone indicates activities done both in

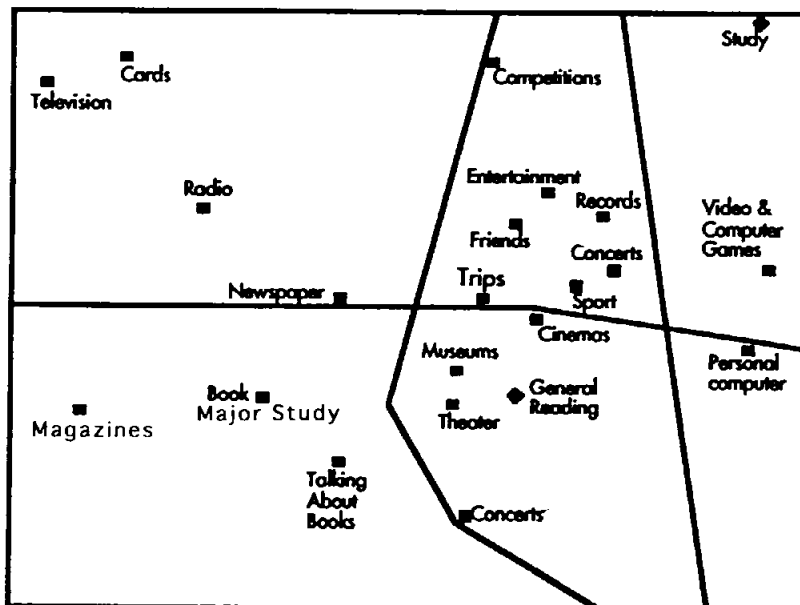


Figure 1. SSA1 map of interrelations among cultural activities and leisure activities.

and outside of the home. This includes study, video, video and computer games, and use of personal computer.

General reading lies in the middle of various activities. There is a concentration of high level cultural activities on its left, some conducted outside the home, and others at home. The position of reading books and watching television highlight the weak interrelations between them. Both are home activities but are situated on the opposite sides of the map. In contrast both general and active reading are situated close to computer use and video. Video and computer games are among the lighter activities requiring lower cultural capital. By contrast, personal computer, which combines the monitor and screen, mixes technological features characteristic of television. This indicates that a high degree of traditional and interactive media literacy are required, placing computer use in the same zone as active reading and other related activities.

It should also be noted that various activities in the SSA map are not divided by media type (audiovisual vs print). On the contrary, there is a mixture of various media types: television, radio and VCR are in the same zone as sports, local newspapers, whereas the personal computer is in the zone of cultural activities requiring high cultural capital such as active reading and reading-related activities.

An examination of various indicators of reading behaviour by years of schooling demonstrates that formal schooling remains the most influential factor in determining reading habits. A comparison of groups defined by age clearly shows that the percentage of active readers is high among older population with more than 16 years of schooling.

Data presented in Table 1 shows the relationship between background data such as age and reading habits of parents and the reading habits of the respondents. There is a positive and significant relationship between the reading habits of the students and those of their parents. This finding is similar to previous empirical studies that show that parental patterns of media consumption strongly influenced their children's behaviour (Neuman, 1986). Regardless of their educational level, respondents raised in a home environment where their parents read books, read more. Among them, this study found

Table 1 : Age and Active Reading

	Gr. 1	Gr. 2
Active reading :	49% *	85% *
parental reading habits	.71	
correlation between age and active reading :	0.55	0.75

* one book/month

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation results between Frequency of Reading (Books) and other independent variables

	Gr. 1	Gr. 2
Age :	0.39	0.85
Newspaper :	0.37	0.88
Magazine :	0.65	0.67
Television :	- 0.26	- 0.34
Radio :	0.25	0.53
Computer :	0.45	0.79

* significant at $p < .001$ level

Table 3: Frequency of Media Use in-between groups

	Gr. 1	Gr. 2
Books	4	1
Television	1	4
Radio	5	5
Computer	3	2
Magazines	2	6
Theatres	8	7
Newspaper	6	3
Concerts	7	8

a significantly higher percentage of general readers and active readers, who read at least one book a month. The results also indicate that age and educational level, as well as number of years of formal schooling determine to a large extent the degree of active reading.

Comparison of uses and gratifications derived from books, newspapers and television shows that the print media is still considered powerful agents in fulfilling a wide array of psychosocial needs.

In contrast to the 2nd group of respondents, for the young Japanese, the television is still very widely used today. Books remain the most helpful medium in satisfying cognitive needs, such as the desire to learn and improve, the development of good taste, and the best means of gratifying affective needs, such as the experience of other people's lives or reliving the past.

Books also occupy first place in satisfying two other, somewhat different needs: the escapist need to release tension, and the instrumental need to use time effectively (Ikeguchi, 2000). This study also reveals a low degree of interchangeability between books and

television, a finding that points to a functional “division of labor” (Adoni, 1995) among the various media. The evaluation of books as helpful in fulfilling various needs increases proportionately with the number of years of schooling.

The evaluation of television’s helpfulness, on the other hand, declines with the rise in educational level. In other words, people with higher education are able to use books more to fulfill their psychosocial needs. There were no differences found between different groups with regard to the helpfulness of newspapers.

Summary and Conclusion

Active reading correlates strongly with various cultural activities such as the theater, concerts, museums, traditionally considered high culture requiring a high degree of cultural capital and appropriate socialization. This corroborates the findings of previous empirical studies that readers are more active participants in other cultural and recreational activities, and active reading is practiced more often by those with higher levels of schooling.

This study explores reading behaviour with the underlying assumption that we are witnessing a transition period to a new media environment. The results suggest a dialectical relationship that exists between the two distinct types of literacy linked with the two main media, print and audiovisual screen.

Despite the extremely radical changes in the media environment, the group of Japanese population used in the study still read newspapers, magazines, and books regularly. A common expectation in previous studies conducted in other countries (Adoni, 1995) that the scope of book-reading public would increase correspondingly with educational level was fulfilled. There is a marked difference in book reading frequency between the younger and older population.

In the late 20th century, audiovisual media, television and the VCR have prepared the terrain for computer usage, fostering a new type of interactive literacy. Dramatic expansion in the scope of media environment has led to the expectation that much would change in the reading behaviour, media consumption and leisure patterns of today’s Japanese.

The uses and gratifications derived from the various media clearly demonstrate that even after the dramatic growth and expansion of the electronic media, books still fulfill central psychosocial needs. It is however impossible to reach sweeping conclusion for all the print media. The data show that television and newspapers are more interchangeable than television and books. Moreover, whereas reading newspapers has been found to be

less functional, reading books has remained high in all its unique functions. As for learning needs, books are evaluated as more helpful than television by all the respondents. Furthermore, the results obtained from this study indicate that frequency of reading increases with age and with level of schooling.

The traditional pastime of reading is at least temporarily jeopardized by the time-consuming computer and video games. At the same time, reading skills help young people master the new interactive literacy. The decline in the frequency of reading among the young must be explained both in terms of social factors, and in terms of changes in the media environment and the emergence of a new, interactive type of literacy. Interpretations of the data from this study seem to suggest that the use of print is widespread and fulfills a vast array of psychosocial needs and that traditional literacy is making a comeback through audiovisual media.

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* A copy of the questionnaire may be obtained from the author.