

UGA researchers find e-readers fall short as news delivery tool

January 27 2010, by Sherrie R. Whaley

(PhysOrg.com) -- Portable e-readers such as the Kindle are unlikely to win readers back to the newspaper habit unless they include features such color, photographs and touch screens, according to research conducted at the University of Georgia.

Young adults in particular compared the [Kindle](#) DX used in the study unfavorably to smart phones, such as the [iPhone](#) or Blackberry.

Professors of advertising Dean Krugman and Tom Reichert, and Barry Hollander, an associate professor of journalism in the UGA Grady College of Journalism and [Mass Communication](#), conducted the research project over a six-month period in 2009.

Athens-area residents were provided Kindles to read The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. In-depth interviews and focus groups followed to learn their likes and dislikes of the e-reader.

The Atlanta daily newspaper dropped Athens from its circulation area in 2009, prompting the researchers to wonder whether e-readers such as the Kindle, sold through Amazon, might be a viable substitute for the traditional newspaper.

“We are in the first phase of the project which compares e-readers, such as the Kindle, to traditional newspapers and online delivery systems,” said Krugman. “Our focus is on the way people consume media in a rapidly changing environment. Earlier, we employed similar methods

when studying the growth of the multi-channel television environment.”

While adults of all ages were impressed by the readability of the Kindle screen, describing it as “easy on the eyes,” few considered it a primary way to read news.

For younger adults, the Kindle fell short when compared to their beloved smart phones, with touch screens and multiple applications—from music to surfing the Internet—available in a single small package. The e-reader felt “old” to them.

Older adults were overall more receptive to the concept of an e-reader. However, the Kindle failed to include aspects of the traditional newspaper they had grown fond of, such as comics and crossword puzzles.

Cost was a factor regardless of age. Nearly all respondents balked at the Kindle DX’s \$489 price tag for reading a newspaper.

As a stand-alone attribute, Krugman said, the newspaper feature is likely not strong enough to sell the e-reader. “It should be seen as one of a constellation of services for the device including books, magazines, etc.”

A number of competing e-reader or “tablet” systems are expected on the market soon, including one by Apple.

The first phase of focus groups was conducted in part by UGA students, with faculty guidance, in an advertising research methods class. A second phase will provide respondents the use of Kindles before undergoing more rigorous in-depth interviews to answer questions raised in the initial research. A key part of the study will examine if and how an [e-reader](#) becomes part of a consumer’s daily media experience.

Provided by University of Georgia

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