

# Research reveals print text remain top shelf selection for Aussie teens

November 30 2016, by Pepita Smyth

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New research slams the book shut on the stereotyped teenager glued to their digital devices, finding adolescents prefer old fashioned print when reading for pleasure.

The joint research from Deakin and Murdoch Universities is shining a spotlight on the recreational reading habits of [teens](#) and the interim findings are providing a treasure trove of information on how, what and where 12 to 16 year olds are reading and the [social aspects](#) surrounding that activity.

Project leader Dr Leonie Rutherford said print texts were proving more of a page turner for Australian teens than texts on digital media devices. And the teen reading study had also reinforced the importance of public and school libraries to youth, with 54 per cent of participants holding a public library card.

Murdoch University researcher Dr Margaret Merga who collaborated on the project, said the study's findings challenge the popular notion of teenagers as a group of digital natives, with uniform digital literacy skills and preferences for reading on the screen.

"This idea is so popular and pervasive, that some schools in Australia and the USA have removed paper books from their libraries, and gone eBook only," Dr Merga said.

"Our findings would suggest that this is a mistake, and such decisions,

which are not supported by research, may limit [young people](#)'s access to books in their preferred mode.

"Western Australian government funding for the paper book collection of our public libraries was cut in 2016 in favour of digital resourcing. Resourcing decisions should take into account the actual preferences of borrowers, including young people."

More than 550 students from rural, regional and metropolitan Victoria and Western Australia took part in this year's pilot study to investigate the effect of new digital platforms on young people's long-form reading culture, as well as access and enabling factors.

The study, which involved a detailed survey and interviews, focussed on areas including reading frequency and volume, digital platform reading, apps, software and social aspects.

"Our early findings are that young people overwhelmingly prefer to read paper books," Dr Rutherford said.

"And I found it quite surprising that over 50 per cent held a public library card."

Dr Rutherford, from Deakin's School of Communication and Creative Arts, said early findings challenged the common perception that teenagers wanted to do everything on digital devices. The study also revealed a big difference in young people's digital literacy.

Initial findings include:

- At least 70 per cent of the surveyed teens read at least weekly for pleasure;
- Half the teens read for at least 15 minutes each day;

- Reasons for not reading included lack of time and difficulty finding a good book;
- The majority of teens with access to a mobile phone, tablet or laptop did not use the digital devices to read books;
- While almost quarter of teens had access to an e-book reader, few regularly used the device;
- High-frequency readers were more likely to read e-books than other teens; and
- Of the teens reading e-books, more than 60 per cent accessed them through free download or file-sharing sites.

Dr Rutherford said while the last decade had dished up new and exciting technology for reading on different digital platforms, the tactile and sensory lure of print books continued to attract teens when it came to reading for pleasure.

"A lot of research shows that reading for pleasure – sustained reading, primarily of fiction – is strongly tied to kids' results in school and their chances of getting better jobs later in life," she said.

The research team is now keen to roll out the study across the rest of the country.

Provided by Murdoch University

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