Quantitative and qualitative methods applied to comparative student reading habits and book buying research in Croatia, Italy and China

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Introduction
The objective of this poster is to present the methodology and results of an investigation in progress. The aim of this research is to analyze the main aspects of the reading habits and book purchasing behaviour of university students. In the past, numerous studies on reading behaviour have been carried out which involved individual countries and Europe as a whole. These studies allowed us to define the general framework of this phenomenon and to distinguish readers based on age, place of residence, gender, occupation and other socio-demographic variables.

However, the university student population has rarely been specifically targeted as a subject of research, particularly as regarding the behaviour of voluntary reading (i.e. the autonomous and independent reading of books not related to exams).

The authors will present a theoretical framework and the outcomes of a comparative study conducted at the University of Pisa, Italy, the University of Zadar, Croatia and the University of Nanking, China.

The authors of this poster have put forth the claim that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods is a means which should provide interesting answers to the questions of research; these relate to the research of reading habits and the purchase of books.

Our paper will consist of two main parts.

The first part will present our theoretical framework which has the slow but constant use of qualitative research in the social sciences as its basis, namely in information science and marketing in several countries.

The second part will present the results of a pilot study based upon the quantitative and qualitative methods which were used in a comparative study of the habits of book buying and reading of university students in Pisa, Italy (a total of 55.000 students, a sample of 561 students, Zadar, Croatia (a total 5.500 students, a sample of 193 students) and Nanking, China (a total 30.000 students, a sample of 350 students).

Theoretical framework
Our general theoretical framework ranges from LeGoff’s (1985) research regarding the effects of different forms of reading on the emergence of intellectuals in the Middle Ages to the issues discussed by Carr in his work: ‘Shallows, what is the Internet doing to our brains?’ (2010). In the midst of such a broad and fascinating theoretical framework and within the context of the primary interest of our research, there is an issue which Gordon and Lu (2008) have explained in the following way: „There has been “a downward trend in voluntary reading among youth at both the middle and high school levels over the past two decades” (Alverman et al., 2007, 34, as cited in Gordon and Lu, 2008) that clearly signals that something other than reading for leisure is occupying their time. That “something” may be a literacy now emerging based on digital technologies.“

We have also found the evidence for arguments that have been frequently expressed and scientifically proven that reading impacts the development of an individual personality and one’s intellectual abilities. We also accepted the claim that what is missing in early childhood cannot be replaced in adulthood. In order to justify this claim we will quote the following statement by Clark and Rumbolt (2006):

„Research with children has shown that reading for pleasure is positively linked with the following literacy-related benefits:

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• reading attainment and writing ability (OECD, 2000) for reading that is done both in school and out of school (Krashen, 1993; Anderson et al., 1988; but also see Taylor et al., 1990);
• text comprehension and grammar (Cipielewski and Stanovich, 1992; Cox and Guthrie, 2001), even after a variety of health, wealth and school factors were statistically controlled for (Elley, 1994);
• breadth of vocabulary (Angelos and McGriff, 2002), even after other relevant abilities such as IQ or text-decoding skills are controlled for (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998);
• positive reading attitudes (Guthrie and Alvermann, 1999), which are linked to achievement in reading (McKenna and Kear, 1990);
• greater self-confidence as a reader

Correlational studies have also consistently shown that those who read more are better readers.“

Regarding our methodology, we will also show that it has become common knowledge (for the last twenty years or so) that there has been an ongoing debate in social science circles on the justification of the application of qualitative research methods. We belong to the camp that believes that a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can yield more reliable, credible and detailed results.

In regards to this topic we will cite Leburić (1997, as cited in Leburić and Kamber, 2000), according to whom it seems likely “that research strategies of a multi-methodological and multi-perspectival character will generally develop with greater intensity, and in the most general terms of access, when applied to social phenomena. It may prove possible, and perhaps of great help, to combine surveys with focus groups or some other types of interviews that have a different structure or case study methods as well as typically qualitative methods. The integration and application of a number of methods, including focus groups, will increase the advantages of these methodological combinations in a theoretical sense as well. In cases such as these the results may prove more credible considering that their diversity is one of the fundamental comparative advantages of such multi-methodological research strategies. Besides, the more methodologically complex the research, the more challenging it is. “

Methodology

Quantitative
We will show the results of a comparative study using online questionnaires that was conducted in October and November of 2012. Students in Pisa completed a questionnaire in Italian, and students in Zadar filled out the same questionnaire but in Croatian.

In 2014 we expanded our research by conducting a poll with students in Pisa, Zadar and Nanking using printed questionnaires, in order to compare the differences between an online sample and the sample of students that completed a printed questionnaire.

Qualitative
We conducted two focus groups in Zadar and two in Pisa. In each city one of the focus groups included students who consider themselves to be avid readers and the other group included students who do not like to read. The first focus group in Zadar consisted of 8 participants and the second consisted of 4. The Focus groups in Pisa consisted of 10 participants each. Due to the poor response to the second focus group in Zadar we invited not only those students who do not like to read but also those who like to read, but prefer to spend their leisure time differently. However, even the few students (N=4) who responded actually read a lot. The reason for this being that in Zadar students who truly do not like to read did not respond and this indicates that they hide their non-reading as they consider it to be socially unacceptable. On the other hand, in Pisa there are at least 10 students who had the courage to admit that they do not like to read and don’t even consider this to be something they should be ashamed of. Due to the number of participants, the results of the focus groups do not allow a generalization, but they provide interesting insights into the opinions and attitudes of students toward the habits of buying books and reading.

Research questions
We attempted to find answers to thirty questions which we considered relevant to the theme of our research and for this poster we have decided to present the results which have come to light based on the following research questions:
- What are the reasons for reading, why do students read in their leisure time?
- Who influenced their reading habits and do they read more or less than they did in secondary school?
- What informs their decision to select the title (theme) of the book that they will read?
- How much time is spent reading online?
- When reading online, on what device do they read?

Results
Our poster will show the results based on questionnaires conducted online, as well in print, and on our conversations with focus groups on the questions mentioned above.
Conclusion
Here we will provide a summation, in a few points, of the main results of our research and will provide a detailed description of the plan for our future investigation. We will also provide an overview of the results which will prove of interest for our future research with the aim that teachers, librarians, booksellers and publishers acquaint themselves with the book-reading habits of students by taking into consideration the main questions of our research.

Keywords: quantitative methods, qualitative methods, reading habits, book buying, university students

REFERENCES

Curriculum Vitae
Alessandro Gandolfo, PhD at the Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna of Pisa (Italy), is associated professor at the Department of Economics and Management at the University of Pisa (Italy) and the Department of Information Sciences at the University of Zadar (Croatia). He teaches marketing research, economics and entrepreneurial management and marketing in the publishing sector. The focus of his work is on market research and the application of marketing principles and strategies of goods and services. He is author of many works on market research, and marketing and commercial distributions. Currently he is president of the msc degree in Marketing and market research at the University of Pisa. He started working at the University of Pisa in 1995 and at the Zadar University in 2012.

Mate Juric has been a research assistant at the Department of Information Sciences at the University of Zadar since July 2011. His former occupation was as Psychologist in a Primary School. As of September 2012, he is enrolled in the PhD study programme of ‘Knowledge Society and Information Transfer’. His teaching and research interests include cognitive science, research methods, statistical analysis, and user studies in library and information sciences. He has published research papers on information literacy, reading habits and information needs.

Srečko Jelušić is Full Professor at the Department of Information Sciences at the University of Zadar. He teaches courses on the information society, the sociology of books and reading, and research methods. His research interest is in reading habits and information needs. He has published three books: The Structure and Organization of Library Systems (the Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb), A Librarians Guide on How to Publish (with Ivanka Stričević, Chandos Publishing, Oxford) and Essays on Publishing (Naklada Ljevak, Zagreb). He was president of the Croatian Library Association and of Croatian Independent Publishers. During his professional career he was manager of the Rijeka Publishing House, director of the University Library in Rijeka and director and editor in chief of Begna Publishing. He started working at the University in Osijek in 2001, and has been working at Zadar University since 2007.