

A Study on the Reading and Writing Culture in the Era of Smart Focused on Concept of the Thumb Generation & Reading 2.0

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Abstract

A new era has begun where almost every daily transaction is done by smart media from diverse work procedures, data search, learning, to relationship building, communication, entertainment and killing-time activities, etc. Actually, it is not that there is 'nothing' smart phone cannot do but the kind of 'things possible only via smart phones' have surrounded every modern day people just as air. M, Serres called the smart generation of today as the 'thumb generation' and said they thought with 'two different brains', rightfully recognizing the situation where smart devices already functioned as if a body part of the smart generation. For smart people living in a digitized daily environment, reading/writing is just natural and accustomed routine just as breathing. 'Digital texts' are brief articles containing daily thoughts on contemporary, practical issues in the form of letter writing for oratory, discussion or answer to others. Digital texts are actions of diverse conversations and joining others, similar to Socratic dialogues and Menippean satire. Serres viewed them as the 'chatting of the thumb generation', that is, the beauty of rumbling. This will be a key to the era of 'reading 2.0' where all of the books are connected to a single giant book. This is where the Renaissance of new reading/writing would begin, which we will explore from the perspective of humanities.

Keywords: *Digital Reading/Writing, The era of Smart, The Thumb Generation, Reading 2.0, E-book*

1. Smart Generation to Think with Two Brains - Thumb Generation

“The thumb generation people move ten fingers busily on a rectangular space looking like a single book page to write on the screen or only two thumbs to write in their mobile phones. Once the job is done, the thumb generation instantly sends it out. Innovators in each field move out in search of new e-books. Although e-books are completely different from paper books and contain something totally different from the historic shape of a rectangular single page, they have never been anything else than books. They said something totally different needs to be discovered from now on. And for such a job, the thumb generation will help us. [...] Although the recent revolution is as strong as at least the invention of printing and writing, there has been no change in knowledge, methods to teach the knowledge and the space arrangement in universities. It is all the same as the previously invented forms and shapes by books and for books, which is not what it should be. The new technology should escape from the kind of spaces affected by books and individual book pages. Then, what should we do?” - Michel Serres

With smart media in place, new phenomena have emerged. If we portray ourselves holding a smart phone everywhere any time in the modern society, we may have to depict, smart phones as part of our body. People, who have become unable to survive a day without a smart phone, have nothing they cannot do with smart phones. All sorts of works, data search, learning, to relationship building, communication, enjoyment, other things to

kill time, *etc.*. Such smart days begin as people wake up every morning. Indeed, it is not that there is nothing a smart phone cannot do but the kind of things possible only via smart phones has surrounded modern day people just like air. Smart phone withdrawal symptoms have already been reported by several broadcasting programs. Calling them the thumb generation, M, Serres says the smart generation thinks with two brains. Comparing to Saint Denis who held his head to go to a sacred place, he explains the computer held by the smart generation as another brain with a fair understanding that for the smart generation, diverse smart devices including smart phones, have already functioned as a physical part of their body.

M. McLuhan said that the format of media itself ruled their message, that is, contents when saying that 'media is message' [1] to signal that media itself contribute to the expansion of human senses. This means that media is part of the direct surroundings of human life to contribute to the expansion of human senses. In this era of smart devices where media became embedded in daily living environment, such a saying of him presents significant implications to the correspondence between media and human senses. McLuhan viewed media beyond technology as a component of cultural content environment and human advancement. Such a view is consistent with the characteristics of thumb generation by Serres. How much smarter in which ways has become the daily lives of thumb generation who deserves to be called as 'smart people' thanks to various kinds of digital devices functioning almost as their brain and another body part? Being called as the New Generation, they are the first generation in history to spend their whole life from cradle to grave in a 'smart' way. Surrounded by smart environment, these people build relationships regardless of time and space, find necessary knowledge and information anytime anywhere, are interested in multiple different themes, are good at multi-tasking, are open to accept the world and are armed with imagination and creativity. Indeed, they are a 'generation without limit' [2].

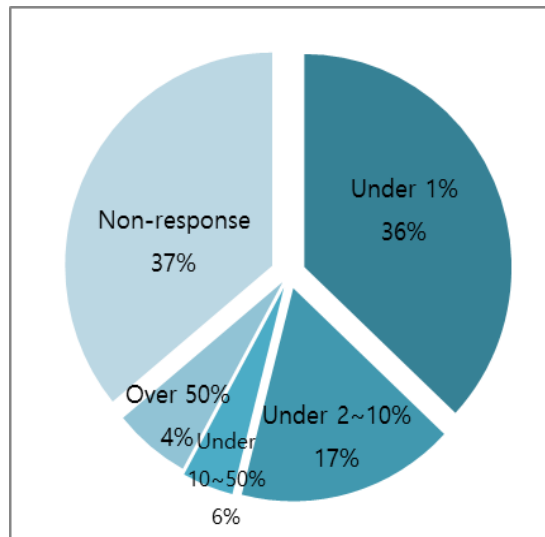
Serres asks. For them who get necessary information and knowledge anytime they want and anywhere they desire, what is the meaning and value of knowledge and information? What is it to own a certain academic background and knowledge? What is it to achieve the calling of life? What is it to build a livelihood and occupation? Denying using the anticipation by parents, teachers and adults in anticipating future, Serres may want to diagnose the thumb generation in the era of smart revolution and lead the revolution to a success from their own perspective. No matter how strong this revolution may be, though it is as powerful as the invention of writing and printing, if there is no change in its derived knowledge and knowledge-developing framework, we may fail to adapt ourselves to this revolution or end up being wasting enormous amount of time. Serres characterizes the thumb generation as 'their heads are different from those of ours', 'they do not live in the same space with us', 'they recognize the world differently', 'they use a different language from us', and 'strictly speaking, these thumb males and females have all become own individuals'[3].

2. Books and Reading/Writing, Now a Completely Different Thing

Now in this literally digitized era, almost every medium we encounter seems to have been digitized and there seems no more to digitize. What does it mean, however, that of the 4 major press media of broadcasting, newspaper, magazine and publication, it was the publication or, that is, books (as material objects) that were the last to be digitized? Multiple studies show that, in fact, 'texts' were initially the first to be digitized. Texts filling in all sorts of digital data, information and knowledge sets became subject to digitization as early as the 1980s. But books (in a fixed material form) for reading (e-books) joined the digital/smart era the latest. Marking the 5th anniversary of the e-book issue sparked by Amazon Kindle, e-book

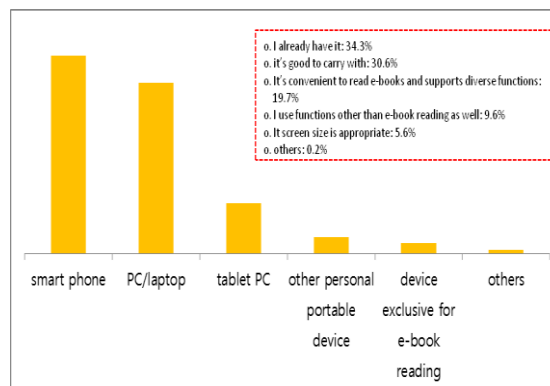
reading culture and relevant industries have shown no sign of activation, troubling involved businesses and governments.

The Figure below is statistics on e-books. As shown in Figure 1, the share of e-book sales in the South Korean publication market in 2012 was recorded as ‘under 1%’(35.7%) > 2~9%(17.1%) > over 10%(10%) in order. Approximately 73% of e-book-publishing companies did not even know the accurate portion of e-book sales or recorded some marginal level even lower than 1%. In the publication industry as a whole, only little number of publishers (19 or 3.8% of the 504 total responding firms under this research survey) was found to earn over 1% sales of their total. The investigation revealed the poor sales turnover and market size along with the current status of the e-book publication sector. South Korean e-book publication sector did not even have any proper statistics. More specific data including e-book-paper book conversion ratio, ratio of new books published in e-book, ratio of old or out-of-print books published in e-book, genre-specific e-book publication ratio and e-book only publication ratio, are necessary to see the demand of readers and necessity of e-book publication.



Source: Korea Publishing Research Center (2012). Research Report on Present Condition of Korea Publishing Business's Digital Ecosystem

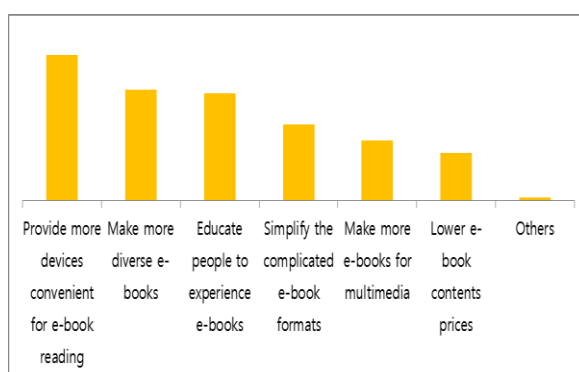
Figure 1. Share of E-Book Sales of Publishers (Against Total Sales)



Source: Korea Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2013), Base is E-Book user 293, unit is %. Research on the Actual Condition of E-Book

Figure 2. Media to Read E-Books

The 2013 fact finding investigation on e-book reading by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the country found only too shameful results even to discuss. E-book reading was found to account for 14.6% of the total. 1.6 books were found to be read by people including non-readers(10.8 books by e-book readers, e-book reading ratio = the ratio of people reading at least 1 e-book for the past 1 year). The e-book reading ratio and frequency were higher in people having office/managerial jobs than students. They were directly proportional to academic background, income level and reading preference. The most favored genre in e-books was genre literature for sure. The respondents said they mainly used smart phones or PC/laptops they normally use to read e-books (Figure 2. This finding contrasts to the case of the US where ‘device exclusive for e-book reading’ ranked the highest). In order for them to read more e-books, it was found to have more diversified contents, technological advancement, price reduction, *etc.* Concerning e-book reading facilitation methods, ‘richer contents’ (31.1%) > ‘e-book reader provision’ (26.5%) > ‘experience education’ (19.5%) were found in order (Figure 3).



Source: Korea Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (2013). Base is E-Book user 293, unit is %. Research on the Actual Condition of E-Book

Figure 3. How to Activate E-book Reading

This slow development of e-publication is viewed to be largely because of the absence of thoughtful consideration of the e-book reading environment and factors attracting more readers. In this situation, the need has emerged to understand and develop digital publication contents reflecting smart media users’ reading features and contents consumption patterns. Given that other digital contents media have been active in nurturing reader-friendly (ambient) environment, the current indifference to e-books seems just a natural outcome.

It is only readers who keep silence about why e-books are not activated. What does it mean that such smart people are indifferent almost only to e-books? It is that they recognize the kind of e-books that just literally digitized paper books the same as those in a material form of the past print industrialization era. And there is no way such an obsolete concept would satisfy the thumb generation. Using two brains to think, the thumb generation needs a brand new kind of digital publication contents. The kind of knowledge and information they need is already ready within the cloud to respond to their access anytime anywhere. It is only a natural outcome that they are indifferent to e-books. Serres talks about how it would be dangerous to approach the thumb generation by using just key words such as knowledge and information provision, learning, *etc.* Although it is obvious that they are the children of books and grandchildren of letters, now knowledge is open to all and ‘in a sense, knowledge is always, already being handed over every corner’. [4]

Smart media revolutionize the ways of knowledge and information distribution and at the same time, humane recognition functions and ways of thinking itself. What is important to the thumb generation is not to digest or store knowledge and information (the brain called as smart media) but the demonstration of their imagination and creativity and use of knowledge information in convergence (their real brain). G.P. Landow suggested the idea of Hypertext 3.0 as a research framework for digital text. [5] It means the kind of hypertext from the perspective of humanities as an advancement of the previous idea of hypertext, simple physical realization of digital technologies. The Bakhtin-style hypertext feature, in particular, that is, a chunk of dispersed but connected texts [6], is viewed as the characteristics of hypertext 3.0. Along the world of such chunks of texts in connection, we could encounter meta-text or universe expanding and growing limitlessly.[7] Stressing the aspect that people's experience about text is restructured through smart technology, he consequentially suggested restructuring texts outside the typical practices originated from the printing technology. In this sense, e-book stakeholders will have to start over from the question 'what are the contents the thumb generation wants via smart media'.

P. Levy warned about cyber culture: 'in the cyber culture that will soon arrive, the gap would gradually be narrower among global markets uncovering themselves in various forms, global media libraries using all linguistic forms, global tools using all kinds of powers, global laboratories testing all kinds of experiences, global councils trying all kinds of administrations, global tribunals dealing with all kinds of disputes and their solutions and global schools with every teacher recommending and teaching individual exploration about all forms of human discovery to contribute to cultural formation and pass-over.[...] Just as pedigrees of every tradition gather inside themselves, every mental pedigree gathers in this cyber space'. [8] Without serious consideration about the culture to be built by the thumb generation and smart media and sincere efforts to understand them from their own perspective, the era of e-book as a decent smart content may never come to us. As M. Serres once said along with his strong request for a better understanding of the thumb generation, the culture where books and reading/writing come in a completely different format is about to dawn. At this point of time, we must remember Serres' warning. 'It won't do'. [9].

3. Books and Reading/Writing Cultural Phenomena in the Era of Reading 2.0 and Its Orientation

For smart people living in a digital environment every day, the act of reading and writing is natural and is an accustomed routine like breathing. From emails, instant messages (messengers, chatting, *etc.*), different kinds of text messages, SNS (twitter, Facebook, *etc.*), blogs, individual homepages, to simple replies, the history of smart people reading and writing texts on a daily basis holds more meaning and significance beyond your imagination. 'Digital texts' are short stories about ordinary thoughts on practical issues of the contemporary time in the forms of letter writing, oratory, discussion or reply to others' opinions. They are the act of diverse dialogues and intervention similar to the ancient Socratic dialogues and Menippean satire. Media aesthetician N. Bolz said the evaluation and analysis of works of art should be done again on the side of the party accepting the work (receiver). And he stresses that 'the current aesthetic situation and experience is hard to be explained within the range of conventional aesthetics. It is not that traditional beauty is to be reproduced by the current works of art or art doesn't have to be related to the ideas of lines or truth'. What if we do not force the smart people that the only value and truth of book is to read or write the kind of material form of paper books of the past

and then, what if we carefully place e-books at the level of their 'daily texts'? That may be the point where the Renaissance of e-book and publication contents would begin.

No matter what the smart people read or write, it is obvious that something critical is going on in their own world. If so, now what we have to do is to find out a methodology about how a genuine smart e-book should look like and how it can approach them. Stressing the importance of digital contents platform, Jihyeon Kim explains that consumer demand for pan-contents/e-books would certainly emerge some day and in such an environment, strong platform player would be a tablet platform. In the mobile platform with an overwhelming number of 32-million users, killer contents are those seeking three goals, 'search, communication and killing time' whereas e-books, the key to knowledge and information contents, are viewed to be optimal for the tablet platform.[10] Some say that the smart people regarding digital devices as part of their body, will face the era of so-called 'Me-multimedia' period. In other words, they will have diverse different devices and consume various contents for multi-purposes dispersively. As mobile platform users have become unable to live without kakaotalk, mobile TV or all kinds of cloud environments, if only we can prepare for the day when tablet platform users cannot live for another day without reading and writing in the smart contents platform, we should design for a day, thinking as if we could never survive without an e-book and its device like our body part just as Saint Denis holding his head to move to a sacred place.

We are entering now a new world of reading and writing that have never been experienced before. Some people who could read helped others experience the contents through recitation, after the initial appearance of reading. During the print industrialization, reading became silent and lonely. As we move to the digital era, people are to experience another new world of reading again. Those who read digital contents write or read replies almost unconsciously and share mutual opinions via conversations, discussions or comments, *etc.* (some e-books are connected to SNS for real-time chatting) Compare to the previous networking across contents based on the act of writing and hypertext function, such a way of reading realizes far stronger crossing among readers. Jaehyeon Lee explained that amid the dominant reading practice of silent reading, changes started in meaningful behaviors and sensory modality due to the unique feature of digital texts.[11] He organizes the new phenomenon of reading in the digital era as the following three aspects: First is 'multiple reading' referring to nonlinear reading, disperse reading, and haptic reading. Second is 'social reading' where texts are extended in the reader/user dimension and a community is formed in the text itself technologically. Third is 'augmented reading' – the 3rd way of reading following recitation and silent reading – called also as 'text 3.0'. It refers to augmented reading such as eye-tracker detected by artificial intelligence beyond simple hyperlink functions. Jaehyeon Lee referred especially to H. R. Cooley among them and viewed haptic reading as the phenomena of reading in the digital period [12].

J. Merkoski also diagnoses the act of smart reading with the idea of reading 2.0. Explaining an example of Google project, Cloud Business, he anticipates a day when all of the books are digitized and loaded in cloud to produce one single universal library. All contents belong to cloud and consumers would only have the right to read (rent) by downloading necessary texts. The nature of electronic books makes it hard to claim ownership which foretells a revolutionary change in ownership or copyright issues regarding the problem of who owns what. This is the point where the characteristics of thumb generation's way of thinking, recognizing and behaving are determined. They are aware of how to access the gigantic library called cloud and would be, after all, interested in only knowledge and information use instead of its storing. Merkoski defines the direction they are heading for in

their reading and writing as 'reading 2.0'. "Cloud is a new library. [...] E-books are within the cloud. [...] I believe Google has a very wise and far-sighted insight. They would finally own our individual libraries. [...] Their strategies may seem to perform low for a short term but those are the most flawless method to lead the next stage of reading I call reading 2.0." [13] The functional change of book reading anticipated by Merkoski is to collect all contents in the world into the cloud and they are all linked by hyperlinks. This will take longer than expected.

4. Digital Humanistic View on Publication Content Renaissance

Global enterprises based on the clouds of Google, Amazon, *etc.*, are struggling to digitally store more and more books and preparing for the era of reading 2.0 in the long term where all of such digitized contents will be linked with hyperlinks to form the whole cloud and it will be presented as one single book free of charge. We will have become complete digital readers throughout our whole lives. And Merkoski's anticipation that Google would own each of our individual libraries after all would be realized soon. He affirms that as a result of Google's long-term project, all of the books will form one single giant book in the end. [14] "When you start reading a certain book, you could follow links and naturally move to another book. [...] I think hyperlink was invented too early in the 21st century. We have yet to fully utilize this invention. Google secured favorable conditions to make it possible. Google knows well about a search engine and understands how to update every book's contents with hyperlinks without harming all of the references between books. [...] As books are linked, cultures are linked as well. [...] The hypertext overlay encompassing every media would allow users to move as they desire from books to films or to animated films and then back to the original book. There would be only one single book about all human cultures. It would be a great book but too long to read within our lifetime." [15].

As such, the thumb generation regarding smart media as part of their body in the era of human cultural book is called hominescence [16]. This refers another step of evolution from homosapiens to another level of humanity. So they are literally neoanthropinae. This new generation has different ways of thinking and viewing the world. They are living in a different time and space and using a different language. For them, language, reading/writing practices, books, and contents as we have known so far would mean something completely different. Now digital publication contents may have to embrace every change in their language, substance, theme, ways of distribution and acceptance, *etc.* They could never be the same as those existed in the times of Socrates. They, with another brain of smart media, come to participate in the consumption of diverse digital contents through converged smart media. In this regard, Serres expects that for the thumb generation, creation would be the only genuine intelligent behavior [17]. Stressing that in education, cultural mixing is an inseparable element, he introduces Tiers-Instruit. "We need to move beyond indices always familiar to us (including all of the physical, psychological, social and cultural indices) and encounter some unfamiliar indices beyond our control. Based on such experience, students (in terms of being different) become third-party tiers (in terms of accessing information) or educated person –instruit. [...] Establish orders but try to think about the kind of orders outside reason or cause. Change the ideal of something called reason." [18] Digital publication contents read and written by the thumb generation revolutionizing the hierarchy of emotion, reason, knowledge and information would be the textbook of 3rd-party education.

Renaissance, meaning to born again, seems the most suited word to express the new people of thumb generation. We, the older generation, need to ask ourselves.

What should be the new publication for this newly born generation? Could publication and books be reborn together with them? The preparatory work to be performed by the older generation for the sake of the thumb generation has just begun. Researchers and publication content-related officials have the obligation to take a humanistic approach to a digital future under preparation jointly by global enterprises and start-ups. In this situation, the author seeks to find an answer in collaborative and generative digital humanities. Digital humanities were born from the interface between traditional humanities and computer-based methodology. Researching about the interaction between computer use and humanities looks mutually contradictory. However, IT experts have long borrowed main humanistic approaches in building ways of computer use. Now it's time for humanities researchers to intervene in key digital phenomena and technologies. Key characteristics of digital humanities are deeply related mainly with design. The ideas such as 'symbolic reproduction of language', 'graphic reproduction of concept', 'style and identity', 'communication and interaction', 'user experience', 'interface', 'digital system' and 'medial design' are the key digital humanistic words requiring more than digital technologies for proper approach.[19]

However, who are currently publishing e-books and leading digital publication contents business? They are not the smart people. They are digital migrants who had to work a lot to live well with digital natives. We can get a clue in our search for what is completely different from paper books from Serres' advice that the thumb generation would help for that kind of thing. Maybe it should be the thumb generation themselves who should play the main role in publishing smart e-books and leading the e-book renaissance. We, the digital migrants (or should I call them 'pencil generation?'), need to build a strong foundation as a reliable helper. We can talk about hope because we, the digital migrants, are living well with the digital natives and we can achieve a post-Babel miracle if we cooperate together. After the Babel period when the god separated human language for the punishment of human arrogance, we are about to enjoy the blessing of digital in the upcoming post-Babel period where all people would have become able to understand other languages. As E. C. Eoyang said, 'technologies reinforce cultural individuality rather than suppressing it. In the future, diversity will become more and more apparent instead of being blurred. Actually, the inconvenience of the Babel period has become lessened by computers.'[20] Anticipation such as more and more people would desire to read well-written articles and good works of writing then the world would become a better place to live which has been repeated in the history of reading and writing culture. Indeed, the criteria and insight for human aesthetic values are almost instinctive and unchangeable.

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