

Tuesday, 22 July 2014

## Reading between the lines: books and digital not so incompatible

*With Rare Book Week currently taking place in Melbourne, Roy Morgan Research examines the state of Australia's reading habits...*

Ever since the Internet went mainstream, it's been seen as a threat to our book-reading habits, absorbing our attention and impinging on our reading time. But while the proportion of book-reading Aussies has fallen in the last decade, our data reveals that people who do read books are also more likely to spend an above-average time online, suggesting that the two activities aren't so incompatible after all.

In the year to March 2004, 54.9% of Australians 14+ read at least one novel in an average three months, 38.9% read at least one non-fiction book, and 29.8% read at least one of each. By March 2014, these figures had fallen to 50.3%, 33.0% and 25.2% respectively.

### Book-reading habits of Australians: 2004 vs 2014

	2004	2014
% who read novel in last 3 months	54.9%	50.3%
% who read non-fiction book in last 3 months	38.9%	33.0%
% who read novel and non-fiction book in last 3 months	29.8%	25.2%
% who read either novel or non-fiction in last 3 months	64.1%	58.10%
Average time spent on internet per week (total Australians)	6 hours, 40 minutes	17 hours, 25 minutes
Average time spent on internet per week (book-readers)	6 hours, 59 minutes	17 hours, 47 minutes

**Source:** Roy Morgan Research Single Source (Australia), April 2003-March 2004, n=24,983; April 2013-March 2014, n=17,143. **Base:** Australians 14+

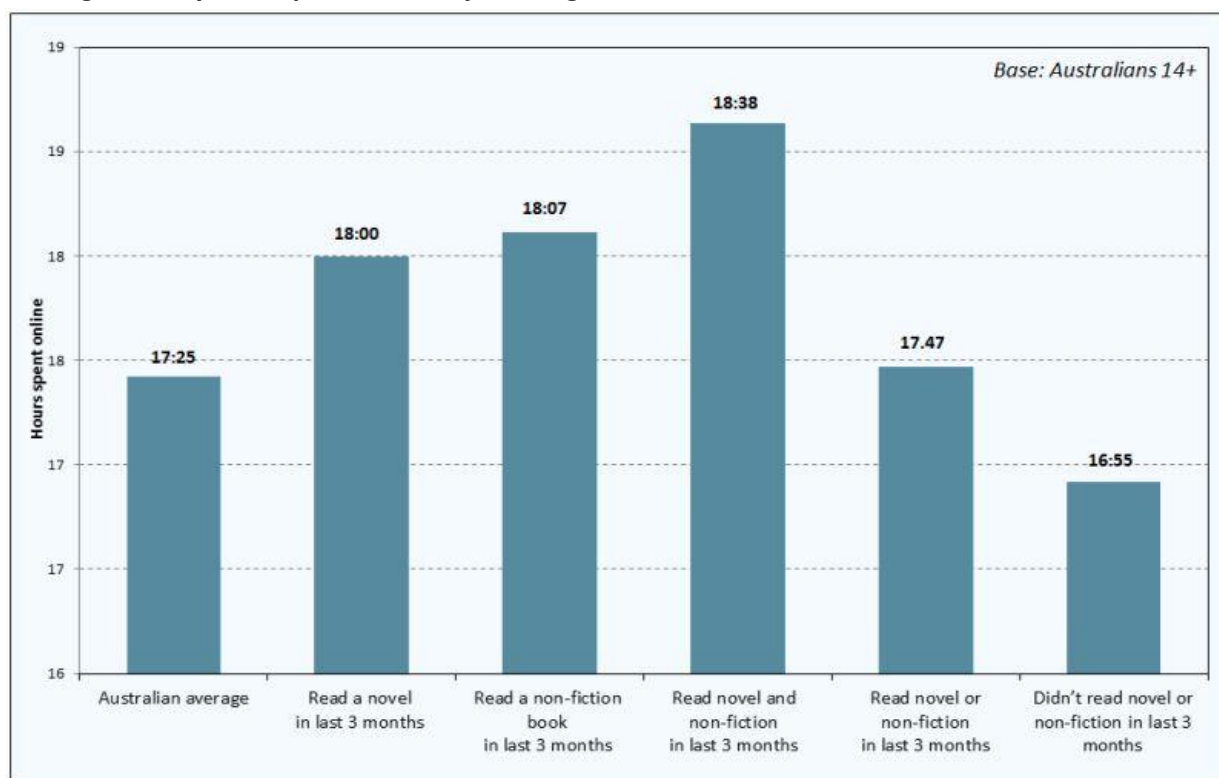
Over the same period, the average time per week we spend on the internet has almost tripled. Whereas the average Aussie spent 6 hours, 40 minutes on the Internet per week a decade ago, they're now online for a weekly average of 17 hours 25 minutes.

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## Switched on and well read

Confounding theories that surfing the net is killing reading, it appears that book readers find time to do both. In the year to March 2014, novel-reading Aussies spent 18 hours online per week (more than half an hour over the national average); non-fiction readers spent a weekly average of 18 hours, 7 minutes online; and those who read at least one novel and one non-fiction title spent 18 hours, 38 minutes per week online. Those who read either a novel or a non-fiction book spent 17 hours, 47 minutes.

### Average weekly time spent online by reading habits



**Source:** Roy Morgan Single Source (Australia), April 2013 – March 2014 (n=17,143).

People who didn't read any books came in below the national average, at 16 hours, 55 minutes per week.

### The e-reader phenomenon

Of course, in this digital age, no discussion of reading would be complete without acknowledging the rise of the e-reader. In the year to March 2011, 2.0% of Australians 14+ said they have an e-reader (eg. Kindle) in their household; by March 2014, this figure had multiplied seven-fold to 14.3%. Of these people, almost three quarters (72.8%) read a novel in an average three months and 44.7% read a non-fiction title.

This growth in e-reader market penetration is consistent with a year-on-year increase in the proportion of Australians purchasing eBooks online in any given three months (from 5.5% to 7.1%), and coincides with the slight decline in those buying printed books online (10.7% to 9.5%).

Still, when all is said and done, it's not the reading format that matters — it's the story.

**Norman Morris, Industry Communications Director, Roy Morgan Research, says:**

*“As anyone who commutes on public transport would know, the number of passengers reading books or e-readers is usually far outstripped by those fiddling on their smartphones. It’d be easy to conclude that our increased connectivity is to blame for the decline of our reading habits, but this would be too simplistic.*

*“Our data suggests that spending time online and reading books are far from mutually exclusive activities: indeed, those Australians who read novels, non-fiction books or both actually spend more time on the Internet than those who don’t read. Non-readers, on the other hand, tend to watch an above-average amount of television per week.*

*“The decline in the proportion of Australians reading over the last decade has occurred across most age groups and educational levels, and among men and women. Our data over the last decade shows that more women read than men, and this is still the case — but the proportion of female and male book readers to have dropped off is very similar.*

*“So while it’s difficult to link the rise of the Internet directly to the fall of book-reading, that doesn’t mean this story has a happy ending. If our book-reading habits continue to decline, our general literacy levels will almost certainly suffer.”*

**For comments or more information please contact:****Norman Morris, Industry Communications Director**

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[Norman.Morris@roymorgan.com](mailto:Norman.Morris@roymorgan.com)**Related research findings**

View our range of [Indoor Activities Profiles](#), including [Novel readers](#) and [Non-fiction readers](#), as well as [People in Households with an e-Reader](#); or learn more about our [Time Spent with Media](#) reports. These profiles provide a broad understanding of the target audience, in terms of demographics, attitudes, activities and media usage in Australia.

**About Roy Morgan Research**

Roy Morgan Research is the largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state of Australia, as well as in New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom. A full service research organisation specialising in omnibus and syndicated data, Roy Morgan Research has over 70 years’ experience in collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

In Australia, Roy Morgan Research is considered to be the authoritative source of information on financial behaviour, readership, voting intentions and consumer confidence. Roy Morgan Research is a specialist in recontact customised surveys which provide invaluable and effective qualitative and quantitative information regarding customers and target markets.

**Margin of Error**

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

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Sample Size	Percentage Estimate			
	40%-60%	25% or 75%	10% or 90%	5% or 95%
5,000	±1.4	±1.2	±0.8	±0.6
7,500	±1.1	±1.0	±0.7	±0.5
10,000	±1.0	±0.9	±0.6	±0.4
20,000	±0.7	±0.6	±0.4	±0.3
50,000	±0.4	±0.4	±0.3	±0.2