

How to Improve Literacy in the Digital Age? Evidence from an Online Book Platform

Evert de Haan

University of Groningen

Lily (Xuehui) Gao

Stockholm School of Economics

F. JAVIER SESE

University of Zaragoza ESQ5018001G

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Abstract

Literacy is a fundamental human right that enables individuals to participate fully in society, yet recent evidence shows a continued global decline in functional literacy in the digital age. This study focuses on Goodreads, an online platform connecting book readers and authors, and investigates (1) the role of authors in influencing users' reading behavior over time and (2) the impact of users' reading behavior (i.e., book quantity, variety, and difficulty) on their literacy levels. Using a unique dataset of 18,647 users who read 643,707 books and wrote 40,196 reviews over 15 years (2007–2022), and applying difference-in-differences and panel data techniques, the findings show that books promoted by their authors receive more readership, especially when authors are highly active, and that users who read more, and more challenging books exhibit higher literacy. The study sheds light on how to improve literacy by leveraging reading behaviors within online reading platforms.

Track: Digital Marketing & Social Media