

Profiling the Intrinsic Reading Motivation of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the qualitative dimensions of intrinsic reading motivation among Generation Z young adults in a Malaysian university. While quantitative results highlighted general motivational trends, the qualitative phase provided deeper insights into readers' attitudes, habits, and interests. Using the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) and conversational interviews with a sample of 178 students, data were thematically analyzed to construct reader profiles. Four categories emerged: avid readers (consistently read for enjoyment and learning), ambivalent readers (engage selectively based on interest), apathetic readers (read mainly for external rewards), and averse readers (actively avoid reading). Findings revealed that peer influence, viral trends, and interactive platforms such as Wattpad and Goodreads significantly shaped reading practices. Many students viewed reading as both a source of escapism and a tool for mental well-being. The study concludes that understanding these diverse profiles is essential for designing strategies that foster sustained intrinsic motivation and cultivate meaningful reading engagement among young adults.

Keywords: Intrinsic reading motivation, Motivation to Read Profile (MRP), Generation Z, young adults

INTRODUCTION

Intrinsic reading motivation—reading driven by inherent enjoyment—is a key driver of academic success and personal development (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). However, motivation often declines during adolescence and into young adulthood, posing challenges for literacy interventions. This study examines the qualitative dimensions of intrinsic reading motivation among Generation Z young adults in a Malaysian university. Rather than framing readers as simply “motivated” or “unmotivated,” the study adopts a nuanced profiling approach to capture a spectrum of engagement. Using the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) and conversational interviews, the analysis identifies four reader profiles: avid readers (read for enjoyment and learning), ambivalent readers (engage selectively), apathetic readers (read primarily for external rewards), and averse readers (actively avoid reading).

Using the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) and conversational interviews with 178 intrinsically motivated students, this study qualitatively analyzes their habits, attitudes, and interests to construct detailed reader profiles. Thematic analysis revealed four emergent categories: avid readers, who read for enjoyment; ambivalent readers, who engage selectively; apathetic readers, who read for external rewards; and averse readers, who actively avoid it.

Findings indicate that peer influence, viral trends, and interactive platforms like Wattpad significantly shape reading practices, with many students viewing reading as both escapism and a tool for mental well-being. By delineating these diverse profiles, this research provides valuable insight for educators aiming to cultivate sustained and meaningful reading engagement among young adults.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intrinsic reading motivation, the act of reading for inherent enjoyment, is a powerful predictor of academic achievement and personal development, though this form of motivation often declines as students enter adolescence (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2005). Extensive research establishes a strong correlation between high intrinsic motivation and increased reading comprehension, frequency, and breadth (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). However, a consistent body of research documents a sharp decline in this motivation as children transition into adolescence and young adulthood, posing a significant challenge for educators. Early models often presented motivation in binary terms (motivated vs. unmotivated), a perspective that fails to capture the complex spectrum of reading engagement and attitudes.

The rise of digital media has fundamentally altered the reading landscape for Generation Z. Interactive platforms such as Wattpad and Goodreads, alongside viral social media trends, now play a significant role in shaping reading habits and book choices, often mediated through peer influence. Furthermore, the perceived function of reading has expanded beyond utilitarian purposes; for many young adults, it serves as a vital tool for escapism and a strategy for promoting mental well-being. This evolving context necessitates a more nuanced understanding of readers. A profiling approach, categorizing readers as avid, ambivalent, apathetic, or averse, offers a framework to move beyond simplistic labels and explore the specific factors that drive or hinder engagement in this contemporary digital ecosystem.

The young adults from Generation Z (born roughly between 1997 and 2012), possess distinct characteristics that fundamentally shape their literacy practices. As the first generation of true digital natives, their engagement with text is inextricably linked to the online world, where information is immediate, social, and visually driven (Pew Research Center, 2018). Unlike previous generations, their decision-making, including content consumption, is heavily influenced by peer networks and online communities. They often prioritize authenticity and user-generated content over traditional sources of authority, which explains the significant impact of viral trends and peer recommendations on their reading choices.

Furthermore, this cohort demonstrates a heightened awareness of mental health, openly discussing its challenges and actively seeking strategies for well-being (Twenge, 2017). This psychological backdrop reframes the purpose of reading. For many, reading is not just an academic task but a deliberate act of self-care, a tool for escapism, and a method for promoting mental wellness. Consequently, their motivations are multifaceted, driven by a search for personal connection, digital community, and psychological respite. Understanding these socio-digital and psychological drivers is crucial for interpreting the reading habits of young adults and necessitates a more nuanced profiling approach—such as categorizing them as avid, ambivalent, apathetic, or averse—to effectively foster lasting engagement.

In summary, the literature confirms that while intrinsic reading motivation is crucial, its decline among young adults necessitates a more contemporary analysis. The existing research establishes Generation Z as a unique cohort of digital natives whose literacy practices are deeply intertwined with peer networks, online platforms, and a conscious pursuit of mental well-being. However, a significant gap remains in qualitatively understanding how these modern influences shape a *spectrum* of reading attitudes, rather than a single, monolithic experience. There is a clear need to move beyond broad demographic trends and develop a more granular typology of young adult readers. Therefore, this study aims to address that gap by constructing distinct reader profiles—from avid to averse—to provide a nuanced framework that can inform more effective and targeted pedagogical strategies for this generation.

METHODOLOGY

The study involved 178 young adult students enrolled in academic English courses at a single Malaysian university (Universiti Teknologi MARA). The sample comprised students from various academic disciplines (e.g., Business, Science, Engineering, Law) and included roughly equal numbers of male and female students. Detailed demographic data (e.g., age, specific discipline breakdown) is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic of Participants

Demographic	Characteristic
Total Sample Size	178 Young Adult Students
Institution	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia
Academic Level	Undergraduate/Young Adults (
Academic Discipline	Not explicitly stated, but includes various fields: Arts, Science, Business, Engineering
Age Range	18-25 years old

Using the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) and conversational interviews with 178 intrinsically motivated students, this study qualitatively analyzes their habits, attitudes, and interests to construct detailed reader profiles. Thematic analysis revealed four emergent categories: avid readers, who read for enjoyment; ambivalent readers, who engage selectively; apathetic readers, who read for external rewards; and adverse readers, who actively avoid it. Findings indicate that peer influence, viral trends, and interactive platforms like Wattpad significantly shape reading practices, with many students viewing reading as both escapism and a tool for mental well-being. By delineating these diverse profiles, this research provides valuable insight for educators aiming to cultivate sustained and meaningful reading engagement among young adults.

To gather data on reading habits, interests, and attitudes, the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2005) was administered to all 178 respondents. This instrument was composed of two distinct sections: a self-report scale (25 items) assessing components such as reading self-concept and reading value, and a measure of reading interest (15 items) that required respondents to rate their interest in various reading materials (e.g., narrative vs. expository texts). The data analysis for was conducted in two primary stages. The first stage involved the comprehensive profiling of intrinsic readers. Following this, respondents were grouped according to their emergent profiles to inform the selection for subsequent focused group interviews. This section details the methodology employed in the reader profiling stage.

Following the profiling stage, conversational interviews (Burgess, 1980) were conducted with a smaller, stratified sample of 20 participants (5 from each profile) to provide deeper qualitative data. The unstructured interviews were guided by open-ended prompts, such as: "Tell me about a time you read something purely for fun," and "How do your friends influence your book choices?" The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Initial Categorization of Reader Profiles The qualitative data from the conversational interviews vividly illustrates these profiles: An Avid Reader remarked, "I read because it feels like I'm living a hundred different lives. If I don't read for a few days, I feel like something's missing." Conversely, an Ambivalent Reader stated, "I only finish a book if it's trending or recommended by my close friends. If I'm not interested in the topic, I'd rather scroll through TikTok." An Apathetic Reader confessed, "Reading for assignments is a must, but outside of class, I just don't see the point. Why read when I can watch a movie?" Finally, an Adverse Reader explained, "I actively avoid reading. It brings back bad memories from school where I always struggled. It feels like a chore."

An initial thematic analysis of the data, guided by the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), led to the identification of four distinct intrinsic reading profiles. This categorization provides a more granular view of reading habits beyond a simple monolithic definition of an "intrinsic reader." The four profiles are defined as follows:

- **Avid Readers:** This group consists of individuals with a profound and consistent passion for reading. They actively seek opportunities to read, derive genuine pleasure from the act itself, and typically engage with a wide variety of genres. They often participate in social discussions about literature.

- **Ambivalent Readers:** These individuals exhibit a conditional relationship with reading. Their enthusiasm often depends on external factors, such as the specific subject matter, social context, or current life circumstances. Consequently, their reading habits tend to be inconsistent.
- **Apathetic Readers:** This profile describes individuals who are largely indifferent to reading as a leisure activity. While they may read when required for academic or professional purposes, they do not find significant pleasure in it and rarely choose to read voluntarily.
- **Averse Readers:** This group harbors a strong dislike for reading and actively avoids it. This aversion may stem from past negative experiences, leading them to perceive reading as a burdensome chore.

From this categorization, the motivation Read Profile (MRP) was administered. To gather data on reading habits, interests, and attitudes, the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) was administered to all 178 respondents. This instrument was composed of two distinct sections designed to capture both self-perception and detailed motivational factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the qualitative data from the MRP began concurrently with data collection and continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning new information was no longer emerging from subsequent interviews. Adopting the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), the data were systematically coded to identify emergent patterns in reading motivation. Categories were continuously created, refined, and revised throughout this iterative process. This section presents the findings related to the primary research question: *What are the reading profiles of intrinsic readers?* The analysis is organized according to the three sub-questions addressing reader profiles, attitudes, and habits.

The Four Profiles of Intrinsically Motivated Readers

The initial phase of the analysis addressed the primary research question (RQ2) by identifying distinct profiles among the 178 intrinsically motivated young adult readers. Through a self-administered questionnaire, participants categorized themselves into one of four predefined profiles. The distribution of these profiles is detailed in Table 2. The data reveals that the Ambivalent Reader profile was overwhelmingly the most common, accounting for nearly 70% of the respondents. This finding suggests that for the majority of intrinsically motivated young adults, interest is a critical catalyst for reading engagement, particularly when differentiating between leisure and academic texts. This aligns with observations by Zaini (2022), who noted that ambivalent readers achieve greater fulfilment when reading for pleasure. The identification of these categories is crucial, as understanding a reader's profile helps predict their patterns of continuous reading engagement (Merga, 2017).

The Reading Attitudes of Generation Z Readers

To address the sub-question, *What are their reading attitudes?* Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to explore reader perceptions, self-concept, and the external factors shaping their disposition towards reading. Quantitative data from the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) revealed that social factors significantly shape reading attitudes.

The Social Dimension of Reading

A key finding emerged from the self-concept component: the highest-scoring item was the statement, *"My close friends thought reading was fun."* Conversely, one of the lowest-scoring items was, *"I think I read a lot better than my friends."* This strong correlation between peer perception and self-concept is consistent with prior research on young adult readers (Chapman, 2018; Malloy, 2015), which indicates that a positive social context encourages enthusiasm and engagement in reading practices (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2005). Furthermore, echoing the expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1983), the value placed on reading was a strong motivator. The highest-scoring item related to reading value was, *"Reading a book/story not required for academic was*

something I did almost every day," underscoring the prevalence of intrinsic motivation for non-prescribed reading.

Digital and Peer Influence

Qualitative analysis of the conversational interviews identified three dominant patterns that shape the reading attitudes of Generation Z as such,

Peer Influence and Viral Trends: Respondents indicated that online trends, particularly on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, are powerful motivators. A book's viral status or its popularity within their immediate friend group often compelled them to read it to participate in a shared cultural experience.

Influencer Recommendations and Reviews: Unlike previous generations who relied on traditional literary critics, these readers turn to "BookTokers," "BookTubers," and other social media influencers for recommendations. The relatability and perceived authenticity of these influencers have a profound impact on their reading choices.

Collaborative and Interactive Reading Platforms: Participants thrive on the social interaction offered by platforms like Goodreads and Wattpad. These digital spaces transform reading from a solitary act into a communal one, where users discuss plots, share reviews, and engage with a global community of readers. This collaborative element was reported as a significant motivational factor.

The Reading Habits of Generation Z Readers

To answer the sub-question, *What are their reading habits?* The study examined reading frequency, material preferences, and the underlying motivations driving these habits.

Reading Frequency and a Preference for Digital Sources

The data indicated that respondents engage frequently with both academic and leisure materials, with a majority reading daily or weekly in both categories. A significant finding was the overwhelming preference for digital sources for academic purposes. A total of 90% of respondents reported preferring websites for academic reading, while traditional sources like textbooks (48.8%) and encyclopaedias (15%) were favoured less. This reflects the deep integration of digital media into the academic lives of young adults, a trend well-documented in recent literature (Davis, 2018).

Digital Book Referrals and Reading for Well-being

Qualitative data provided deeper insight into how readers discover books and their core motivations for reading. Sources of Book Referral: Echoing the findings on reading attitudes, participants identified a range of digital sources for book discovery. These included:

- Social Media Platforms: Instagram ("Bookstagram"), TikTok, and Twitter.
- Dedicated Websites: Goodreads for tracking, reviews, and recommendations.
- Online Forums: Reddit communities such as r/books.
- Subscription Services: Curated monthly book boxes.
- Digital Libraries and Podcasts: Apps like Libby and book-related podcasts.

While digital referrals were dominant, traditional word-of-mouth recommendations from friends remain a trusted and effective source.

Reading as Escapism and for Mental Well-being

A powerful, emergent theme from the interviews was the role of reading in managing mental health. Respondents frequently described reading as a form of escapism—a necessary retreat from the pressures of a constantly connected world. With a heightened awareness of mental health, these young adults intentionally use reading as a therapeutic tool to manage stress and anxiety, finding solace and a mental "recharge" within the pages of a book. The analysis revealed six primary categories encompassing reading attitudes, habits, interests, motivational factors for narrative and expository texts, sources of book referrals, and sources of motivation.

Table 2: The Profile of Intrinsic Readers

The Profile of Intrinsic Readers	
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Avid Readers	16.48%
I enjoy reading at home and school and am dedicated to finishing it because I want to do well and learn from it. (1)	29
Ambivalent readers-	68.75%
I enjoy reading books that I am interested in, but not necessarily academic reading. (2)	123
Apathetic readers-	12.50%
I do not enjoy reading but will do the reading assignment or read a book if there is a reward at the end. (3)	22
Averse readers-	2.27%
I do not like reading and try to avoid reading. (4)	4
TOTAL	178

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides a necessary and nuanced understanding of intrinsic reading motivation among Generation Z young adults. By moving beyond a binary view of reader engagement, the identification of four distinct profiles—avid, ambivalent, apathetic, and averse—reveals the complex and varied relationships this cohort has with text. The findings confirm that for these digital natives, reading is a socially mediated practice, profoundly shaped by peer influence, online platforms like Goodreads, and a conscious use of literature for escapism and mental well-being. Therefore, fostering a genuine passion for reading requires educators to abandon one-size-fits-all strategies and instead develop empathetic, targeted approaches that resonate with the unique motivations and characteristics of each reader profile, ultimately cultivating more meaningful and sustained engagement in the digital age.

A primary limitation of this study is its reliance on participants from a single university and the lack of a control or comparison group, which limits its generalizability to a broader young adult population. Future research should consider cross-institutional or longitudinal studies to validate these profiles across different contexts and track motivational changes over time. These studies could also test the efficacy of pedagogical

strategies designed specifically for apathetic and averse readers, such as incorporating interactive, social reading tasks.

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