

Whatever happened to the students who
would quote the great novelists at each other
in arguments?
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Abstract:

In this essay I have looked at the effect of preferences and the choices that stem from the preferences and then at the effect that the choice can have, essentially the opportunity cost of picking digital media entertainment, such as video games, movies, television shows and things of a similar nature over the reading of literature or vice versa.

Prior to the technological revolution of the late 1990s and the early 2000s, when the internet leapfrogged from the obscurity of the professional geek tampering away at hard drives in garages to the popular explosion of enthusiasm experienced during the Dot-com Bubble, the student was seen as the articulate and well-read individual. Now times have changed, and he who was once considered the embodiment of knowledgeable study has become the FIFA playing lad of today. In this essay I will look at whether this change is due to the rise in access to entertainment that alleviates boredom that would have previously been cured by the reading of the great works of fiction, and/or the studying of other interests outside their degree.

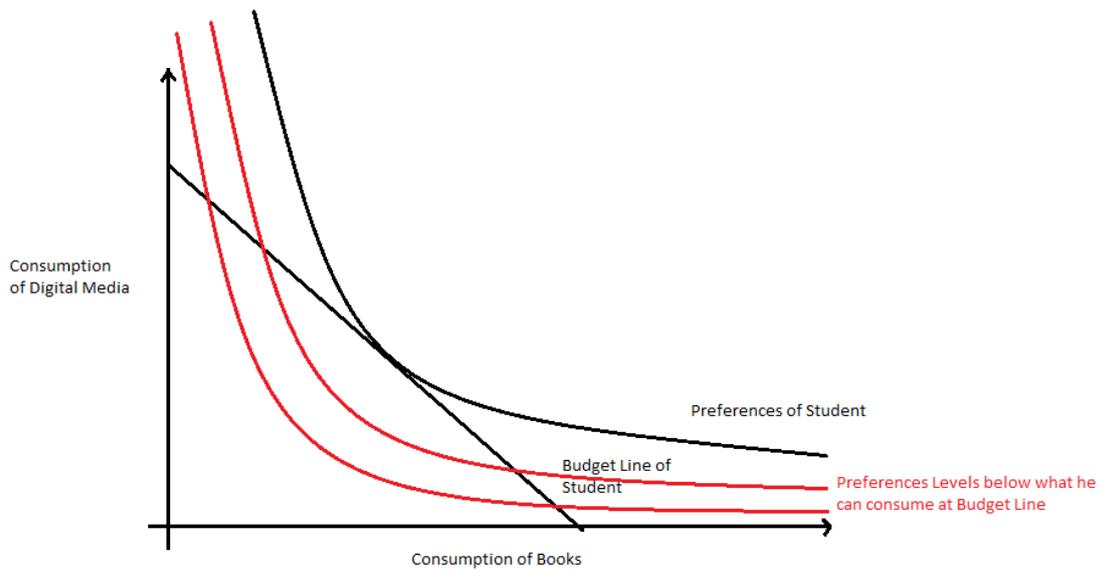
I will attempt to explain the benefits and downsides that students would experience if their sole focus during leisure time was full consumption of one good, and then full consumption of the other. There have been studies conducted on the amount of time students actually spend studying week on week (mainly in the USA), which have concluded that study time has gradually decreased, from an average of 40 hours per week in 1961 to 27 in 2003 (1), so what are students doing in their spare time?

The student has to make a decision as to how much they are willing to spend on either good, which also is within the budget they will set for these goods. In this case the goods are substitutes for one another.

This decision can be centred on the economic principal of choice, which states that the student can only afford a certain amount of goods within their available means. This suggests that there will be an optimum point at which they will be happy to consume. This point will exist where their budgetary constraints and what they would like to consume meet. This is illustrated in Diagram 1 (below). They will always have different levels of wants

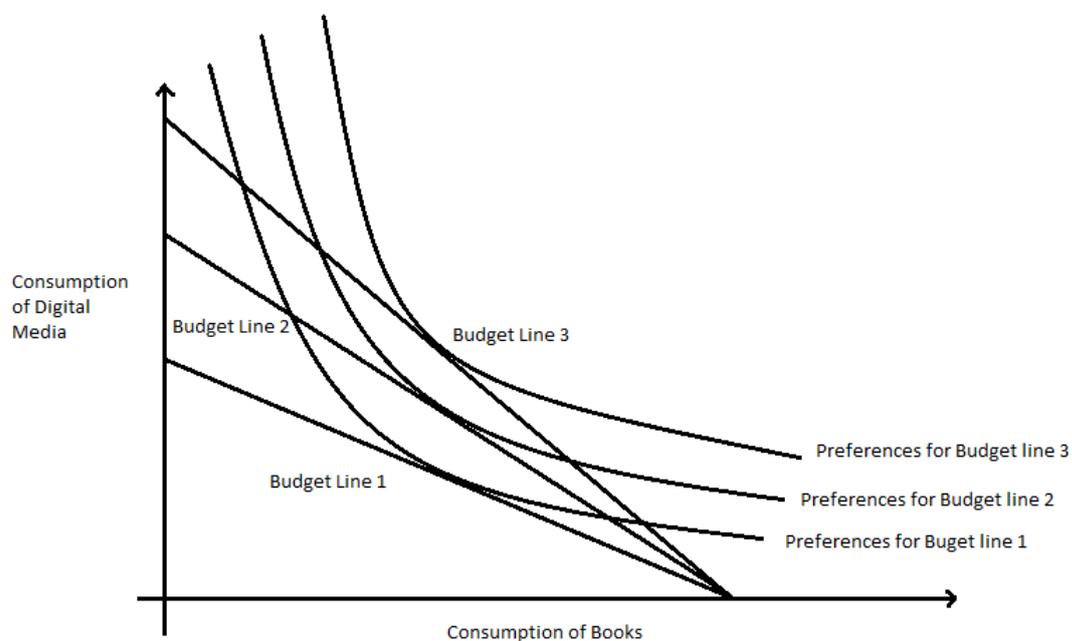
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(the red lines) for different budgets but they will be most content where their budget lets



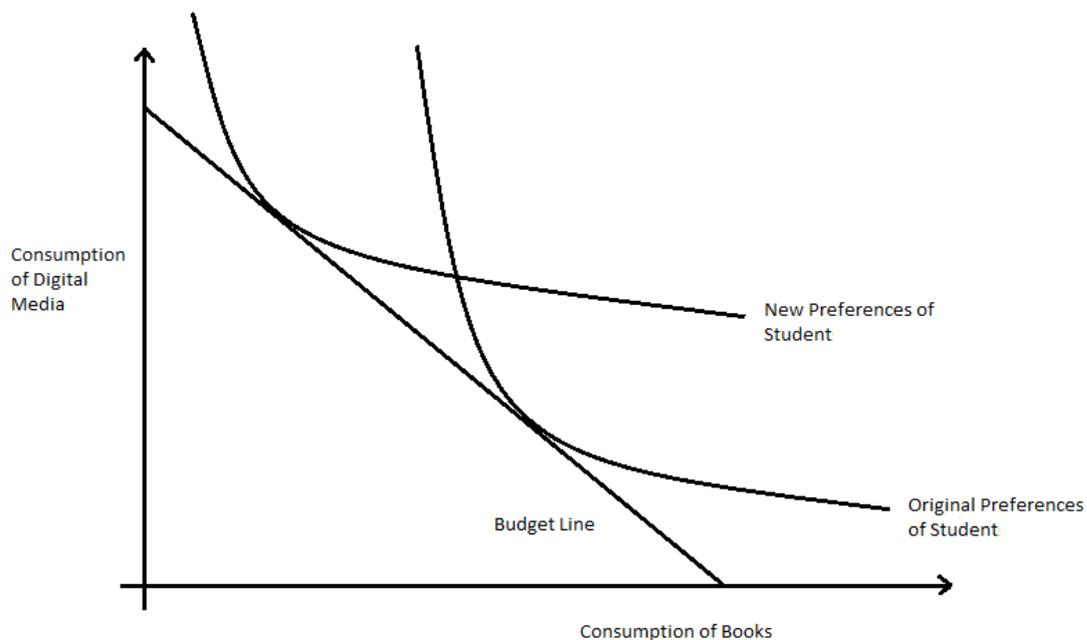
them meet their most effective level of consumption of the two goods.

As the growth of the availability and affordability of digital media has increased, the preferences of students have shifted towards consuming more digital media than books. This is due to the decreased overall cost of digital media, which used to be a rather expensive hobby but is now considered a necessary study aid and communication medium. In the diagram below (Diagram 2), I have illustrated that as the price of digital media has



decreased, the consumption has increased, since students can now afford more within their budget. I have held the price of books as a constant, as they have remained relatively unchanged pricewise in comparison with inflation and income rises.

Due to the aforementioned decreases in cost, there has also been a change in preferences towards digital media, illustrated in diagram 3, where the student has decided they would prefer to consume more digital media than books.



This change in preferences is rather interesting, as the reasons are wide-ranging. A lot of these are of a psychological aspect, such as peer pressure attitudes and a wish for social conformity on the part of the student. There is also the constant influx of advertising that we are submitted to on a daily basis, informing us that we are missing out. There is also the question of escapism on the part of the student, as digital media entertainment also offers a more submersive and more easily attainable way of escaping one's reality. This gives the

students a break from their studies, but the impact of choosing digital media as entertainment over reading as a pastime has only started to be assessed in studies on children and not adults (5-7).

There are many benefits to the continuous use of digital media as entertainment for the student, as it allows the student to be constantly up to date with world affairs and matters that can have an effect on their course. It also means the student is already well integrated into the high level technological interface that most businesses now use in daily activity, giving valuable skills in this area (2). This also allows for students that gain employment in these businesses to multitask and change focus rapidly, which some jobs may require. The student also benefits socially by being up to date with their friends through social network mediums such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc. and also through discussion, if they are so inclined, with others online on subjects that they may feel strongly about. This allows the student to gain in their ability to provide arguments and insights, building and working on their strengths and weaknesses through this.

There are, however, drawbacks to this constant access and usage of digital media forms of entertainment. The student can find difficulty in coping with boredom when the digital media stimulus is removed and lose focus easily (3-4). The student can also become less articulate if time is spent on more leisurely digital media such as video games, which have no real discernible benefit to the user. The student also can lose out, when following the leisurely aspects, by not having knowledge of other fields and by also only having knowledge of short-term events such as minor things, as a lot of current events are forgotten within 1-3 years unless they are of special significance. The student will not have enough knowledge of past events that have had a far wider and greater range of impacts that can be lost upon the

ignorant student. This can have an effect on the student's cultural understanding. For example, if the student was offered a job in South Africa but had no knowledge of apartheid then the student is at a significant disadvantage.

The use of books as entertainment, both print and e-ink format, can benefit the student in a variety of ways, such as if the student has to offer a level of focus and thought towards understanding the contents in front of them. This can lend the student an ability to focus when in a job that requires careful examination or focus upon a given task, rather than constant shifting. The student can also increase their vocabulary and change their perspective on matters that they feel deeply about, and learn to question and rationalise matters that arise on a daily basis. They also tend to be less expensive than many other forms of digital media, with many books that are out of copyright available online for free. They can also be beneficial, as they offer the student something to discuss with others, be it in a social/peer group or in a job interview. The reading of literary novels, not popular fiction, has been shown in studies to improve a person's emotional intelligence (5-7) which can be greatly beneficial to the student in general life.

The drawbacks will be that books can take more time to consume, depending on the ability of the student, and can detract from the essential studies of the student. The student can also absorb information that may be harmful to the individual if it is able to indoctrinate. Access can also be limited, perhaps due to language barriers. The expense can also be greater compared to that of a lot of digital media, as books still in copyright can hold a hefty price tag while a lot of digital media can be obtained for free, either through legal or illegal means. The student can also lose out on learning essential computer skills by not absorbing them from the daily interaction experienced by habitual digital media consumers.

In conclusion, although there are benefits to using either digital media or through the reading of books during leisure time as a student, a better balance would be the best thing for a student to attain, an optimum level that gives the student the skills offered by either sets of entertainment, which also minimizes the cost of holding a much skewed preference consumption level of one above the other, reducing the opportunity cost to the student. The current trends of shifting away from the reading of books in favour of entertainment should be corrected by the student, or otherwise the student may be at a significant loss when they spend all their time playing FIFA or Call of Duty instead of picking up a Dickens, Graham Greene or Orwell when having free time.

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