

## **Exploring Media Preferences and Surreal Perceptions: Implications for Libraries among Millennials and Gen Z Master's Students**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the media preferences of Millennials and Gen Z master's students at Mizoram University, focusing on their inclination towards movies over books and the implications for libraries. The research aims to understand how these preferences impact their perception and experience of surreal elements in literature. Thematic analysis was conducted on data gathered from six focus groups comprising a total of 36 participants. Findings indicate a predominant preference for movies among both generational cohorts, with Gen Z displaying a stronger inclination towards visual media for its immediacy and sensory appeal. Millennials, while fewer in number, expressed a nuanced appreciation for books, particularly in their ability to stimulate imagination and foster deeper emotional connections through surreal elements. However, overall, the study highlights a declining interest in traditional reading practices, with implications for library services. Participants emphasized that movies provide a seamless visual and auditory experience, contrasting with the perceived effort required for sustained engagement with books. This shift has led to decreased library visits and a preference for digital resources and streaming platforms. Concerns were raised about the potential loss of the immersive and reflective experiences that books uniquely offer, particularly in exploring complex themes and abstract ideas. The study underscores the importance for libraries to adapt to these changing preferences by enhancing digital collections, offering multimedia resources, and creating flexible study environments that accommodate diverse learning styles. Additionally, there is a need to promote reading clubs and activities that reintroduce the joy of reading and foster community engagement among students.*

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**Keywords:** Media Preferences, Millennials, Gen Z, Movies vs Books, Surreal Elements, Library Adaptation, Digital Resources, Multimedia Services.

### **1. Introduction**

In the digital age, media consumption has dramatically shifted, particularly among the youth (Bennett, 2008). Traditional reading habits are increasingly being replaced by the visual and auditory allure of movies (Baron, 2021). This trend raises an important question: are young people missing out on the surreal and imaginative experiences that books uniquely provide? Surreal elements in literature—those fantastical, dream-like aspects that transcend ordinary reality—play a crucial role in stimulating imagination and critical thinking (Caws, 2016; Halpern, 1981). This study was structured as a somewhat informal conversation between

library science professionals. If given the choice between reading the entire Harry Potter series and seeing the entire film series, most of them chose to watch the movie version because they would much rather unwind than engage in actively labor-intensive reading. The Harry Potter films did not include everything from the book, although depicting a significant portion of the plot. The debate among book readers on the degree of emotion and surrealistic experience that a book may provide that a movie cannot actually inspired me to conduct this study.

Currently, we are examining the existential crisis facing physical library spaces in light of evolving technologies and shifting patronage patterns (Grove et al., 2023; Hawkins, 2019). The number of individuals who traditionally accessed libraries has significantly declined due to generational shifts in library usage (Powell & Wessies, 2021). Media preferences among different generational cohorts potentially impact libraries in various ways (Anderson et al., 2023; Kwan, Chan & Chiu, 2023). This study aims to investigate the factors influencing the preference for movies over books among master's students at Mizoram University. By focusing on this demographic, we seek to understand the implications of this shift for literary engagement and cognitive development. The study evaluates the potential loss of the surreal experiences offered by books, which may not be fully replicated by movies, and examines the role of libraries within this evolving media landscape. Employing a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative focus group discussions, we collect comprehensive data on students' entertainment preferences, the reasons behind their choices, and their perceptions of the cognitive and imaginative impacts of movies versus books. This paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on media consumption among youth and proposes practical solutions for libraries to adapt to these changing preferences while promoting the invaluable experience of literary surrealism.

## **2. Literature Review**

Recent research underscores a growing preference for visual media among younger generations, leading to a decline in traditional reading. Klopfenstein Frei et al. (2024) found that Swiss youth favor visual formats like videos and memes, primarily accessed through social media. Similarly, Laor and Galily (2022) revealed that Generations Y and Z in Israel prefer on-demand digital content, with secular individuals consuming more digital media than their religious counterparts. This shift from print to digital media is further corroborated by Nyambane (2021), who reported a strong preference for internet resources over printed books among the youth, emphasizing the convenience of digital access. Despite this trend, the unique benefits of literature in conveying surreal experiences remain significant. Works by authors such as Gabriel García Márquez and Haruki Murakami effectively blend the fantastical with the mundane, engaging readers' imaginations and challenging their perceptions of reality. Kidd and Castano (2013) demonstrated that reading literary fiction enhances Theory of Mind (ToM) abilities, fostering empathy and cognitive flexibility. The immersive nature of literature offers readers the ability to mentally simulate experiences, providing deeper emotional and cognitive engagement compared to visual media. However, the rise of digital media has prompted concerns about its impact on traditional reading habits and cognitive development. Studies by Appel and Richter (2020) suggest that frequent engagement with visual media may reduce time spent reading, potentially hindering critical thinking and imagination.

Libraries play a crucial role in adapting to these changes and promoting reading. Adetayo et al. (2023) emphasize the need for creating diverse, adaptable library spaces to engage

students who prefer digital resources, highlighting the importance of balancing noise zones and incorporating nature-inspired elements to foster comfort and inclusivity. Chidiebere et al. (2013) underscore the importance of initiatives like Nigeria's "Bring Back the Book" in revitalizing reading culture and emphasize the critical roles of libraries and librarians in fostering reading and literacy. Additionally, Grande and Whalen (2017) highlight the need for adaptive educational strategies that incorporate digital literacy, demonstrating that teacher candidates can effectively use technology to support students with and without disabilities. While digital media poses challenges to traditional reading habits, it also presents opportunities for innovative educational approaches and enhanced literacy engagement. Libraries must evolve to meet the needs of today's digital natives by integrating multimedia resources, creating inviting and adaptable spaces, and promoting the unique benefits of literature in providing surreal and immersive experiences.

### 3. Objectives

1. **To Investigate Youth Preferences:** This study aims to explore and understand why master's students at Mizoram University, including both Millennials and Gen Z, prefer movies over books, particularly in relation to the portrayal and experience of surreal elements.
2. **To Examine the Impact on Surreal Experience:** This research seeks to examine whether the preference for movies over books among Millennials and Gen Z master's students results in a diminished experience of surreal elements that are uniquely portrayed in literature.
3. **To Propose Recommendations for Libraries:** Based on the findings, this study proposes practical recommendations for libraries to adapt and enhance their services, ensuring they meet the multimedia needs of their users while preserving the unique benefits of literature.

### 4. Basis for Selecting Focus Group Participants

1. **Demographic Criteria:**
  - **Age:** Participants were selected from a specific age group that represents Millennials and Gen Z, aged between 21 and 30 years.
  - **Academic Level:** Master's students in various disciplines at Mizoram University.
2. **Inclusion Criteria:**
  - **Interest in Literature and Movies:** Participants should have an interest in both literature and movies to ensure they can provide insightful perspectives on the topic.
  - **Varied Reading Habits:** Participants with diverse reading habits (both frequent and infrequent readers) to capture a range of experiences and viewpoints.
3. **Exclusion Criteria:**
  - **Lack of Interest in the Topic:** Students who do not have a strong interest in literature or movies may not provide meaningful insights.

- **Language Barriers:** Participants must be proficient in the language used for the focus group discussions to ensure clear communication.

#### 4. **Sampling Strategy:**

- **Convenience Sampling:** Participants are selected based on their availability and willingness to participate.
- **Purposeful Sampling:** Selection based on specific characteristics relevant to the study, such as interest in literature and movies.
- **Snowball Sampling:** Participants are recruited through recommendations from initial participants who fit the study's criteria.

#### 5. **Recruitment Process:**

- **Invitations:** Participants were invited via email, social media and google forms.
- **Informed Consent:** Before participation, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights. They were asked to sign a consent form (DLIS, MZU/25/2024).

#### 6. **Sample Size:**

- A total of 36 master's students are recruited for the study, divided into 6 focus groups with 6 participants each. This size allows for in-depth discussions while ensuring a diverse range of perspectives.

### 5. **Focus Group Discussion Venue and Procedure**

The focus group discussions (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022) were conducted in a designated meeting room at Mizoram University, chosen for its conducive environment for open discussion. Each focus group consisted of 6 master's students, evenly divided between Millennials and Gen Z, ensuring a balanced representation of both generational cohorts. The discussions were facilitated by a trained moderator who guided the participants through structured questions related to their media consumption preferences and perceptions of surreal elements in literature. Detailed notes were taken during the discussions to supplement the audio recordings, capturing non-verbal cues and group dynamics. Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives freely, fostering a collaborative and reflective atmosphere. The focus group discussions provided rich qualitative data that were analyzed thematically to explore the nuanced preferences and perceptions of Millennials and Gen Z master's students regarding movies, books, and surreal elements in literature.

### 6. **Findings**

Six focus group discussions were conducted among master's students from various disciplines at Mizoram University to explore their preferences for movies over books and their perceptions of surreal elements in literature. Each group consisted of six participants, totaling 36 participants overall. The discussions were structured around several key questions, including the frequency of movie watching and reading habits, preferences for different media types, engagement with surreal elements in literature, and reasons behind their preferences. The sessions were moderated to ensure all participants had an opportunity to share their views, and each discussion was audio-recorded to capture the nuances of the conversations.

**Table 1: Books/Movie Consumption of Gen Z and Millennial Participants**

<b>Focus Group</b>	<b>Total Participants</b>	<b>Generational Cohort</b>	<b>Age Group Distribution</b>	<b>Preference for Media</b>	<b>Frequency of Movie Watching</b>	<b>Frequency of Reading Books</b>
<b>Group 1</b>	6	Gen Z (3), Millennials (3)	21-25 (4), 26-30 (2)	Movies (4), Books (2)	2-3 times a week (3), 4+ times a week (3)	2-3 times a week (4), None (2)
<b>Group 2</b>	6	Gen Z (3), Millennials (3)	21-25 (3), 26-30 (3)	Movies (5), Books (1)	4+ times a week (4), 2-3 times a week (2)	2-3 times a week (3), Once a week (3)
<b>Group 3</b>	6	Gen Z (4), Millennials (2)	21-25 (5), 26-30 (1)	Movies (6)	4+ times a week (5), 2-3 times a week (1)	Once a week (3), 2-3 times a week (3)
<b>Group 4</b>	6	Gen Z (2), Millennials (4)	21-25 (2), 26-30 (4)	Movies (3), Books (3)	2-3 times a week (2), 4+ times a week (4)	Once a week (2), 4+ times a week (4)
<b>Group 5</b>	6	Gen Z (3), Millennials (3)	21-25 (3), 26-30 (3)	Movies (4), Books (2)	4+ times a week (3), 2-3 times a week (3)	4+ times a week (2), None (4)
<b>Group 6</b>	6	Gen Z (4), Millennials (2)	21-25 (4), 26-30 (2)	Movies (5), Books (1)	2-3 times a week (4), 4+ times a week (2)	Once a week (3), 2-3 times a week (3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>Gen Z (19), Millennials (17)</b>	<b>21-25 (21), 26-30 (15)</b>	<b>Movies (27), Books (9)</b>	<b>4+ times a week (20), 2-3 times a week (16)</b>	<b>2-3 times a week (17), None (19)</b>

The table (Table 1) presents a comprehensive overview of media consumption habits and preferences among master's students, categorized by generational cohort (Gen Z and Millennials). Across all focus groups, a clear preference for movies over books was evident among both cohorts, with Millennials showing a higher tendency to read books regularly compared to Gen Z students.

### **Emergence of Themes from Focus Group Discussions**

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns from the six focus group discussions with master's students, including Millennials and Gen-Zs, regarding their preferences for movies over books and their perceptions of surreal elements in literature. The analysis process involved several steps, including transcription of audio recordings, coding of the data, and identification of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Step 1: Transcription and Familiarization

Audio recordings of each focus group discussion were transcribed verbatim. Researchers familiarized themselves with the content to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' responses and interactions.

## Step 2: Coding

A systematic coding process was employed to categorize the data into meaningful segments related to the research questions. The coding was both deductive (based on predefined topics) and inductive (emerging from the data). Codes included:

- **Visual Appeal:** Comments related to the visual attractiveness of movies compared to books.
- **Imagination and Creativity:** Statements about the ability of books to stimulate imagination and creativity.
- **Surreal Elements:** Discussions on how well movies and books capture surreal or fantastical elements.
- **Time and Convenience:** Opinions regarding the convenience of watching movies versus reading books.
- **Library Visits and Reading Habits:** Comments on changes in library visits and reading habits.
- **Diverging Views:** Contrasting opinions or unexpected perspectives.

## Step 3: Theme Development

Themes were developed based on patterns that emerged from the coded data. The following themes were identified:

**i. Preference for Visual Media:** Many participants, especially Gen Z, expressed a strong preference for movies over books due to their visual appeal and the immersive experience they provide.

*“I prefer movies because they bring stories to life with visuals and sound. It's like being transported into another world.”*

*“Maybe it's just me, but I don't have the patience to get into books. I'd rather watch movies and videos that make me feel and provide a real experience.”*

*Regardless of the generation cohort, the majority of participants preferred visual media over printed materials. Among them, only a minority of millennials and a small number of Gen Z participants were still interested in reading. Participants favoured movies for their visual and auditory effects, finding them more exhilarating than engaging with a book.*

**ii. Imagination and Depth in Books:** Despite the preference for movies, Millennials tended to highlight the unique ability of books to stimulate imagination and provide deeper engagement with surreal elements.

*“Books allow me to create the world in my mind, and I can have that power while reading. I enjoy the freedom of imagining surreal elements in my own way.”*

*“What books can make you feel, a movie can't. When I read ‘All the Bright Places,’ I was fully immersed, experiencing every part of the story. But when the movie came out, it felt like they lost the soul of it, and it didn't evoke any feelings in me.”*

They described movies as transporting them into different worlds effortlessly, contrasting with books, which they perceived as requiring more patience and effort to engage with deeply.

**iii. Capturing Surreal Elements:** Participants had varied opinions on how well movies and books capture surreal or fantastical elements. While movies were praised for their visual effects, books were seen as better for exploring complex and abstract ideas.

*“Movies can show surreal elements beautifully, even things we cannot really picture in our head, but I believe books can make us dive deeper into their meanings and feelings.”*

*“It won’t be right if we say movies lack surreal things. It has its own elements. It is just that my preferences have changed over time. I like to experience things visually and that’s why I prefer movies over books.”*

*“Magical realism, for me, is a way of learning, feeling and acquiring. Only when we read something, can we have that experience. Taking time to think, reflect and all. But when you watch movies, you are spoon-fed, and which is not as surreal as reading.”*

While movies were praised for their visual spectacle, books were seen as offering a more nuanced exploration of complex themes and abstract ideas.

**vi. Convenience and Accessibility:** Time and convenience emerged as significant factors influencing media preferences. Movies were perceived as easier and quicker to consume than books, requiring more time and effort.

*“I watch movies because they’re more convenient. I can relax and enjoy a story without having to spend hours reading. It is absolutely therapeutic.”*

*“Who wants to spend their precious leisure time reading? It’s too much effort. Nowadays, there’s always a movie adaptation. If I have to choose between 1.5 hours of movies and a week of reading to experience a story, what do you think I will choose?”*

*“I think our generation prefers passive activities. Books require active engagement and attention, whereas movies and series do not. We want to be able to multitask, perhaps lie back in bed or eat while being entertained, which movies are perfect for.”*

During a focus group discussion, participants collectively agreed that watching movies is often considered a therapeutic process. They described it as a relaxing activity where they can sit back, unwind, and enjoy the visual and auditory experience without the cognitive effort required by reading. Participants noted that movies provide immediate sensory gratification and can serve as a form of escapism from everyday stressors. They highlighted that movies offer a passive form of entertainment, allowing them to disconnect and recharge temporarily. This discussion underscored the role of movies in providing a soothing and enjoyable experience, contrasting with the more active and immersive engagement with surreal elements that reading provides.

**v. Impact on Library Visits and Reading Habits:** Participants noted a decline in their visits to libraries and reduced reading of physical books in favour of digital media and streaming services.

*“I used to visit the library regularly, but now I mostly rely on streaming services for entertainment.”*

*“Library spaces creep me out. It is so silent and I get anxious thinking I might do something entirely stupid there. I wanted to take a book to study for the UGC-NET exam. But because of this, I didn’t take any book but instead I watched a lot of YouTube videos.”*

*“In some ways I feel like the era of reading is over. Even in my entire friend circle, there were readers, a few year back maybe, who enjoyed going to libraries. But no longer. I don’t think anyone reads anything anymore. We all just go for Netflix or Prime.”*

Participants expressed mixed feelings about libraries, noting that while they appreciate the resources available, libraries can sometimes evoke feelings of anxiety. They described feeling pressured to study or find specific materials when visiting libraries, which can contribute to stress. Many participants indicated a preference for accessing entertainment materials, such as movies and books, online or through streaming services due to the convenience of accessing content from anywhere without needing to visit a physical library. They agreed that this convenience has led to a sense of laziness in seeking out physical books or resources that require more effort to obtain. The discussion highlighted a shift towards digital and online resources, which participants found more accessible and convenient, but they also acknowledged the immersive experience and community aspect that physical libraries offer they have experienced earlier.

**vi. Diverging Views on Media Preference:** Some participants, primarily Millennials, expressed a preference for books over movies, citing the deeper emotional connection and the ability to engage with complex themes.

*“I find books more emotionally satisfying. They allow me to connect deeply with characters and themes in a way that movies sometimes can’t.”*

*“When I we read a book, I feel like we carry that experience and feelings with us for a lifetime. But movies aren’t capable of that. After watching, maybe it will linger for a while. But then it just disappears.”*

During one of the focus group discussions, participants agreed that watching movies might not always be an active process and could hinder their ability to remember content over time. They noted that while movies offer immediate sensory experiences, these experiences are often fleeting. In contrast, reading books provides a more enduring engagement with surrealism, allowing for deeper reflection and a lingering impact. Participants highlighted that reading fosters a more active cognitive process, enabling them to internalize and remember surreal elements more effectively. This discussion underscored the unique benefits of reading in experiencing and retaining surrealism, contrasting with the more passive nature of watching movies.

#### **Step 4: Integration and Interpretation**

The themes were integrated to comprehensively understand master's students' perspectives on media consumption and engagement with surreal elements. The analysis highlighted a nuanced relationship between visual media and literature. Listed below are the key findings after the integration of themes.

- **Preference for Movies:** Majority of Millennials and Gen Z master’s students at Mizoram University favour movies over books due to their visual appeal and immersive experience, which provide effortless transport into different worlds.
- **Generational Cohort Preferences:** While both Millennials and Gen Z show a preference for visual media, Gen Z participants exhibit a stronger inclination towards movies compared to Millennials, who still value books for their ability to stimulate imagination and emotional depth.



- **Imagination and Depth in Books:** Despite the movie preference, a few participants acknowledge books' unique ability to stimulate imagination and offer deeper engagement with surreal elements, allowing for nuanced exploration of complex themes.
- **Impact on Surreal Experience:** The preference for movies may dilute the immersive and enduring experience of surreal elements traditionally found in literature, which are known to foster active cognitive processes and forge deeper emotional connections over time
- **Decline in Library Visits:** Participants report reduced visits to libraries and decreased physical book reading, opting instead for digital media and streaming services due to convenience, comfort and accessibility.

## 7. Conclusion

Thematic analysis of focus group discussions among master's students reveals a significant preference for visual media, particularly movies, over printed materials such as books. This trend is particularly pronounced among Gen Z participants, who overwhelmingly cite visual appeal and convenience as primary factors influencing their media consumption habits. Millennials, while more inclined towards books than Gen Z, represent a minority in this regard. They appreciate books for their unique ability to stimulate imagination and engage deeply with surreal elements, contrasting with the passive nature of visual media consumption. The shift towards movies over books raises concerns about the diminishing experience of surrealism and the cognitive engagement that literature traditionally fosters. Participants frequently noted that movies provide immediate sensory gratification but may lack the depth and enduring impact of books in exploring complex themes and abstract ideas. This sentiment underscores a broader societal trend where convenience and instant gratification increasingly outweigh the nuanced engagement that literature offers.

For libraries, these findings necessitate a strategic response to remain relevant in the digital age while preserving the essence of reading and surrealistic experiences. Libraries can adapt by enhancing their digital collections with multimedia resources that cater to diverse learning styles and media preferences. Creating dynamic spaces that accommodate both traditional and digital media consumption can foster a supportive environment for learning and exploration. Moreover, promoting reading clubs and collaborative reading hours can rekindle interest in books among Millennials and Gen Z, offering structured opportunities for deeper engagement with literature's imaginative and cognitive dimensions. To address the decline in physical book borrowing, libraries should actively promote digital literacy and online access to their resources, thereby mitigating barriers like library anxiety and enhancing user engagement. Emphasizing the value of literature in providing enduring, transformative experiences can help libraries position themselves as vital cultural and educational hubs. By integrating movies and multimedia experiences into their offerings, libraries can bridge the gap between visual media preferences and the rich, immersive world of literature, ensuring that surrealistic elements continue to captivate and inspire future generations.

### Suggestions for Libraries

- **Expand Digital Resources:** Increase the availability of e-books, audiobooks, and digital magazines to cater to the preferences of Millennials and Gen Z who prefer accessing content online.

- **Create Multimedia Zones:** Design dedicated areas within libraries where patrons can access and enjoy movies, documentaries, and multimedia content in a comfortable setting.
- **Host Media Events:** Organize film screenings, virtual reality experiences, and interactive multimedia exhibitions to attract younger audiences and showcase the library as a dynamic cultural space.
- **Promote Hybrid Learning:** Offer workshops and seminars that explore the intersection of literature, visual media, and digital storytelling to foster critical thinking and media literacy skills.
- **Enhance Online Engagement:** Develop engaging online platforms and social media campaigns that promote library resources, events, and digital collections to reach a wider audience.
- **Facilitate Collaboration:** Provide collaborative spaces equipped with multimedia tools where students can work on multimedia projects, film editing, and digital storytelling initiatives.
- **Introduce Book-to-Screen Discussions:** Host book-to-screen adaptation discussions or film clubs that encourage dialogue and critical analysis of how stories are interpreted across different media.
- **Support Community Initiatives:** Partner with local schools, universities, and cultural organizations to create joint programs that promote reading, media literacy, and the arts within the community.
- **Invest in Accessibility:** Ensure that all digital and multimedia resources are accessible to users with disabilities, providing inclusive access to educational and recreational content.

### Limitations of the study

- **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The study's findings are based on 36 participants from diverse geographic backgrounds within Mizoram University, comprising both Millennials and Gen Z master's students. However, the relatively small sample size and specific university context may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader demographic groups or other educational institutions.
- **Regional and Educational Context:** While participants came from various geographical locations, the study did not explore potential differences in media preferences and perceptions influenced by their specific regional backgrounds. This limitation affects the broader applicability of the findings beyond the context of Mizoram University.
- **Homogeneity of Participants:** The study focused exclusively on master's students, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives on media preferences and surreal perceptions within the broader population of Millennials and Gen Z. Variations in socio-economic status, cultural influences, and educational backgrounds among participants were not extensively explored.
- **Methodological Constraints:** Although focus groups provided valuable insights, the qualitative nature of the study and thematic analysis may introduce subjective interpretations. Variations in participant responses and different moderators could impact the consistency of identified themes across focus groups.
- **Self-Selection Bias:** Participation was voluntary, possibly leading to self-selection bias where individuals with specific interests or perspectives on media consumption and surreal experiences may have been more inclined to participate.

- **Temporal Factors:** The study reflects participants' views at a specific point in time, without accounting for potential changes in media technology and consumption habits over time. Rapid developments in these areas could influence how Millennials and Gen Z engage with literature and visual media in the future.

These limitations underscore the need for cautious interpretation of the study's findings within the specified context and highlight opportunities for future research to explore these themes more comprehensively and longitudinally.

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The author has no competing of interests to declare.

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### **Data Availability**

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly. Therefore, the research supporting data is not available.

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