

Comparing Research Abstracts with Conference Abstracts

While research abstracts are often written with a specialized audience in mind, conference abstracts often cater to broader audiences whose investment in and knowledge of a paper's subject cannot be taken for granted. The two provided abstracts summarize the same paper, but are written with these audience differences in mind. Commentary on the differences is provided below.¹

RESEARCH ABSTRACT	CONFERENCE ABSTRACT
<p>The popularity of e-readers invites new ways of researching reading, demonstrating consumers' preferences for technologies that alter and modify their reading experiences. As a preliminary attempt to survey such technologies, this paper examines the various marketing strategies for Amazon's e-reader—the Kindle—alongside the much longer tradition of reading devices designed to make books more portable, accessible, and manageable for readers. I compare Kindle marketing to advertisements and promotional literature for reading-aides in the early to mid-twentieth century. Advertisements for these historical reading-aides foregrounded the act of reading, emphasizing how their use could speed up the reading process while making readers more efficient and alert. I argue, in contrast to the marketing strategies of other reading-aides, Kindle advertisements target readers as consumers of devices rather than of books. I reveal that the consequences of such marketing prompt Kindle consumers to reconfigure their relationship toward reading from one that is content-based to one that is gadget-based. This suggests that a fruitful way to chart consumer attitudes toward reading is through reorienting analysis toward the peripheral devices that modify and surround the reading experience.</p>	<p>Exact sales figures for Amazon's Kindle e-book reader are impossible to come by, but Amazon's final quarterly report for 2009 revealed that millions of customers now own Kindles, and for every 10 "real" books sold, Amazon now sells six Kindle titles. As the Kindle's popularity grows, advertisements for the device not only litter the pages of print periodicals, but are also often seen on television and are prominently featured on Amazon's own webpage, where the Kindle is currently heralded as the site's "#1 bestselling product." The Kindle's popularity also invites new ways of researching reading, suggesting how a history of attitudes toward reading might be connected with a variety of technologies that work to surround and extend the act of reading.</p> <p>As a preliminary attempt to survey such technologies, this paper examines the various marketing strategies for Amazon's Kindle alongside the much longer tradition of reading devices designed to make books more portable, accessible, and manageable for readers. I compare Kindle marketing to advertisements and promotional literature for reading-aides in the early to mid-twentieth century. Advertisements for these historical reading-aides foregrounded the act of reading, emphasizing how their use could speed up the reading process while making readers more efficient and alert. I argue that, in contrast to the marketing strategies of other reading-aides, Kindle advertisements target readers as consumers of devices rather than of books.</p> <p>The ramifications of advertising reading as based on technology rather than content bear significance beyond the field of book history. E-readers, alongside other media, exemplify what Roger Silverstone (1994, 2006) refers to as "double articulation;" they exist as both objects and media. In foregrounding the Kindle as object, Amazon's marketing suggests that the significance of an e-reader's content is ancillary to its significance as a gadget. Charting similar shifts in the marketing of other communication technologies may reveal evidence of changing values in the media consumer marketplace. This paper argues that one fruitful way to monitor such changes is through reorienting analysis toward the peripheral devices that modify and surround content-based technologies. In examining how such peripheral devices are marketed toward consumers, it is possible to more fully understand how and why consumption orients itself toward media objects and subjects.</p>

¹ Abstracts based on "Kindling Consumption: How Amazon's E-Reader Marketing Refashions Readers," a paper presented by Elizabeth Lenaghan at the *Society for the History of Technology Annual Meeting*, Tacoma, WA: October, 2010.

COMMENTARY ON DIFFERENCES

The most obvious difference between the two abstracts is **length**. Conference abstracts are typically longer than research abstracts because:

- (1) Many conference abstracts are evaluated without accompanying papers.
- (2) Conference abstracts are typically evaluated by a less specialized audience than research abstracts and must provide more context to justify their importance.

As far as the **content** that makes up the conference abstract goes, we see that two elements of the research abstract are extended/expanded:

- (1) The **introduction is longer and deliberately catchier**. It promotes the paper's topic by providing specific evidence of e-readers' popularity rather than taking it as a given.
- (2) The **implications of the paper are much broader**. Rather than merely suggesting that this study shows the importance of examining reading practices in expanded ways, the abstract suggests that these findings bear implications for those who study media objects of a variety of types. This helps justify why such a paper would be of interest to the broad audience attending the conference.

The **conference abstract cites the work of other scholars**. Unlike research abstracts, which rarely contain citations, many conference abstracts will contain citations and/or name other scholars in the field in order to:

- (1) Prove the author's knowledge of the field in the absence of a paper to demonstrate the same.
- (2) Show how the author's work builds on and is in conversation with scholarly debates on a particular topic or in a particular field.

The **structure of the conference abstract alludes to the paper's argument/significance by the end of the first paragraph**. Even though conference abstracts are longer, authors should not take this as an excuse for waiting until their final paragraph to make their argument and significance clear. Rather it is advisable to take advantage of a longer word count to reiterate the paper's argument/significance at the beginning and end of the abstract (while using different language).

Both the conference abstract and the research abstract are written as if the paper already exists. Though conference abstracts are often written before a paper is finished (or even begun), it is important to write a conference abstract as if the paper already exists (i.e., the results have already been determined; your argument is definitive). Given this convention, it's expected there may be some changes to these papers before they are presented, but it is also important to try to be as general as possible when describing your results to avoid having to present a paper that is entirely different than the one described by your conference abstract.

