

Reading Research

The PICC undertook an initial survey of reading research in this country and abroad. No national studies existed in South Africa that documented what the end user read, why they read, why not, what kind of material they like/would like, barriers to access and how these barriers can be addressed.

To this end we focussed our strategies for reading promotion on obtaining relevant information from users to inform all other strategies along the book value chain. A three-phased approach was developed.

Phase 1 – Qualitative Research

As this study is a first in terms of an overall look at the South African reading market, focussing on a demographically representative cross-section including race, age, education, income etc., a qualitative study needed to precede the national survey. The aim of the Phase 1 was:

1. To develop preliminary hypotheses about the reading habits of the South African population.
2. To gain insight into 'user/reader dialogue' with respect to reading and then based on this,
3. To identify, build and define concepts and the initial lines of enquiry for the national survey.

The PICC contracted marketing consultants to implement this phase after making the Terms of Reference available to a range of companies. 20 Focus groups formed part the study, 10 individuals per focus group. Individuals were recruited according to important demographics relating to reading in South Africa.

This included the **geographical area**, where the focus groups were spread across various provinces, with consideration for urban and rural areas.

The **Living Standard Measure (LSM)** levels were used to ensure that a range of socio-economic groupings were included. From the poorest with limited access to basic services, to the richest with abundance in access are included in the Living Standard Measure tool. This measure is widely used in South Africa.

The **age** included in the study ranged from 16 onwards.

The **race and gender** profiles were equally important and both male and female groupings, across race, formed part of the study.

The table below summarises the demographical groups that were studied.

Table 1. Demographic variables of focus groups

Geographical area	LSM	Age	Race/Gender
Free State	LSM 1-4	18-24	Black Females
	LSM 9+	25-39	Black Males
Gauteng	LSM 1-4	25 - 39	Black Males
	LSM 7-8	18 - 24	Black Females
	LSM 9+	Gr 11	White Females English
	LSM 9+	40+	White Males Afrikaans
KwaZulu Natal	LSM 1-4	25 – 39	Black Males
	LSM 5-6	40+	Black Females
	LSM 9+	40+	White Males
	LSM 9+	18 - 24	White Females
	LSM 7-8	Gr 11	Indian Females
	LSM 7-8	25 – 39	Indian Males
Northern Cape	LSM 7-8	18 - 24	Coloured Males
	LSM 5-6	40+	Black Females
North West Province	LSM 7-8	Gr 11	Black Males
	LSM 5-6	25 - 39	Black Females
Western Cape	LSM 1-4	18-24	Black Males
	LSM 7-8	Gr 11	Coloured Males
	LSM 5-6	25 – 39	Coloured Females
	LSM 5-6	25 - 39	White Females

Phase 2 – The National Reading Survey

A national survey inquiring on reading habits, activities, behaviour and barriers to fully represent the South African population is to be implemented. This information will be used to segment the market, so that targeted strategies, informed by the people, can be implemented. Government, libraries, civil society, industry and donors alike can use this information.

The national survey will form the basis for a **Reading Intervention Tool (RIT)**. This tool can be used to track changes in reading every two to three years. It is envisaged that the impact and success of various strategies, across reading promotion initiatives, libraries, government and industry can be measured. It will also form an invaluable part of tracking the implementation of a National Book Policy, as the ultimately goal of such a policy is to make sure that the educational, cultural and social contexts of reading needs of people on the ground are met through increased access. It will form part of a broader monitoring and evaluation framework for the book sector that the PICC is developing as we move forward.

Phase 3 – National Reading Campaign

Once we know what users/readers want on the ground, it is possible to segment the market, so that targeted intervention strategies can be implemented. This segmented approach can then be used to develop tailored reading promotion activities for the diverse needs across the population, unified through a central message.

We believe that this is a holistic approach to reading and can be used to inform what authors create, publishing plans for book publishers, where bookshops should be located as well as where libraries should be built.