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## Comparison of the Sony Portable Reader System and the Amazon Kindle

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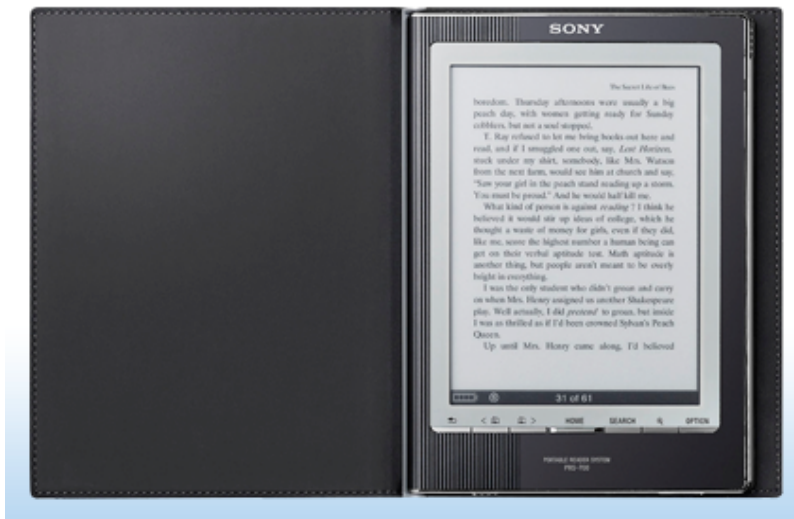


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### **Introduction:**

When I first learned about these digital reading systems, I was unsure about their capabilities and functions. I approached these devices, not as a user of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), but rather as a professional who has experience with different technologies. I am a doctoral student at the University at Buffalo who is just beginning her research and academia experiences in the AAC community. I consider myself to be a multimodal communicator in the technology world. I am a 10 finger typists (my mother always told me that taking a typing class in high school would come in handy one day!) My gmail inbox is always visible on my computer so I can respond back in a moments notice. My cell phone is usually right next to me so that I can text back and forth to friends and family all day. With instant messaging via AOL and Facebook I am always connected to my old college friends and roommates. Most days I rely on these technological forms of communication more than my verbal communication. So, when given the opportunity to use new digital paper products like the Sony Portable Reader System (PRS) and the Amazon Kindle, I dove right in and began learning the in's and out's of these devices and what they could offer the AAC community. I would ask my readers however to keep in mind that these opinions and experiences are coming from the perspective of a student/clinician/potential researcher, not an AAC user. So I am keeping my own biases and needs in mind for how I would personally utilize the reader and not necessarily how an AAC user would control and manipulate the device.

### **The Sony Portable Reader System (PRS-700):**



At first glance before turning the e-book on, I thought that The Sony Reader had a simple design, was relatively lightweight, and had a large enough display screen to mimic an actual book. One of the best features of the Sony Reader was the touch screen. It allowed me to navigate quickly and easily through the ebook without scrolling through menus. However, I did find the Sony ebook difficult to read

at times. The screen was a little too dark and lacked sufficient contrast between the letters and the background. The contrast problem was especially apparent when using the reader across different lighting conditions, where I had to move the reader into different positions in order to read. The Sony Reader does have a backlight option, but it was not

very helpful. The PRS-700 Sony Reader allows its user to store ebooks, pdf and doc files, MP3 and photo files. I found it easy to drag and drop word documents and pdf files from my PC into the reader, when connected by a standard USB cable.

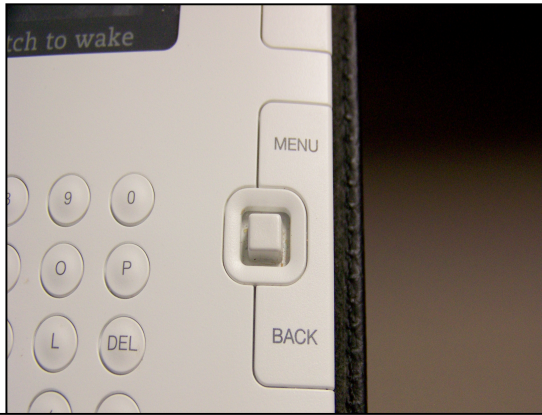
Although my experience with the Sony PRS-700 reader was largely positive I have found negative aspects of their system. While the touchscreen has significant advantages for selection, it can be slow to respond. The Sony Reader takes about 2-3 seconds display a new page, especially when displaying pictures. While the reader can play MP3 audio files, the reader does not have a text to speech option for the ebooks or for the text like files a user may add to the ebook. Also, the reader does not have an external speaker, so all audio files must be listened to via a headset, limiting the audio experience to oneself. I also found that holding the reader can be awkward as there is not a lot of space for a user's hands or fingers to rest without pressing one or more of the menu buttons. This system is definitely an "as is" system that does not allow for much personalization or change of the systems settings beyond what you get once the device is turned on.

### **Comparison between the Sony PRS-700 and the Amazon Kindle II:**



Upon first glance, the Amazon Kindle II has more bells and whistles than the Sony PRS-700 Reader. First, the display is larger and it also includes a QWERTY keyboard ( used to enter search terms, write notes, and access the dictionary features of the Kindle). The Kindle has similar buttons for accessing menus and turning pages on the ebooks. The screen on the Kindle is not a touch screen like the PRS-700, you are able to access the menus and select ebooks via a small square movable click cursor. This click cursor made it difficult to navigate easily through the different Kindle menu options. I found myself unintentionally clicking on items, which created difficulties.

Also, the menus are not consistent and change depending on if you are reading an ebook, a personal document, or looking at your homepage. These "contextualized" menus made my Kindle navigation experience more difficult. However, when comparing the readability and screen clarity, I do feel that the Kindle offers a screen that is more readable in any light.



Kindle II's cursor used to navigate the device

The Kindle also has wireless internet capabilities. With this option you can surf the internet and purchase an ebook right from the Amazon Kindle store. Like the Sony ebook the Kindle II is also able to store personal documents. However, it does not act like a mass USB storage device: dragging and dropping your personal documents into the Kindle for later reading is not possible. However, the Kindle II does offer a paid service that converts Word and PDF files and transfers them wirelessly to your device (5 cents per document). It should be noted however, that with documents graphics are

often reformatted and any hyperlinks are lost. The Kindle II also provides text-to-speech output for most of its ebooks, a feature not offered by the Sony PRS-700. The Kindle also provides both a headphone jack and a small, but sufficient internal speaker system.

### **Conclusion:**

I feel that both reading systems have their pros and cons. It is up to the individual user to research and "test drive" each system to see what would fit them and their lifestyle best. For myself, even though I feel that the touch screen is the best feature out of the two systems, I would purchase the Kindle. This device adds a more natural reading experience due to the screen contrast and device size, so I can grasp it more like a traditional book. I do wish there would be a hybrid version of these ereaders. Offering a touchscreen that was easy to navigate like the PRS-700 with the screen contrast that is offered by the Kindle. In my ideal ereader, I would keep the bells and whistles of the Kindle, such as the wireless internet capability and the audio/text to speech options, however I would like it to act like a USB mass storage device (ie. PRS-700) in order to more easily maintain the formatting integrity of my personal documents.