A Study on Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences among the College Students in Kamrup (Metro) District of Assam

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Abstract

This study examines the digital reading habits and preferences of college students in Kamrup (Metro) District, Assam, with a focus on identifying differences between genders and fields of study. The research aims to explore variations in digital reading habits and preferences between male and female students, identify correlations between these habits and preferences, and assess disparities across different streams—Arts, Commerce, and Science. Based on these objectives, hypotheses were formulated to test for significant differences and correlations within the specified population. Using a descriptive survey method, data were collected from 200 students across five provincialized general degree colleges, chosen based on gender and academic discipline distribution. A semi-structured questionnaire on Google Forms was used for data collection, with gender and academic discipline as independent variables, and digital reading habits and preferences as dependent variables. Statistical analyses, including t-tests and ANOVA, were conducted on the collected data. The study's findings highlighted the digital reading behaviors of college students in the area and established a close relationship between digital reading habits and preferences. Additionally, it was found that students have yet to fully leverage the benefits of digital reading in their educational pursuits.

Keywords: Digital Reading, Digital Reading Preferences, College Students

1.   Introduction

The extensive use of the Internet and alternative reading resources featuring hypertexts and multimedia has significantly altered reading habits. Many university libraries report a decline in the use of print journals and magazines, as younger generations increasingly turn to online media (De Groote & Dorsch, 2001). The rise of online materials and the growing availability of devices for screen reading have sparked academic interest in how people read in digital environments. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a gradual shift towards hybrid education. Despite this, research on the changes in human reading behavior within digital environments remains limited (Liu, 2005). It is important to pay attention to students' digital reading habits and preferences in the current digital landscape.

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2. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) and Digital Reading Habits

UNESCO's SDG4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." This objective is a key catalyst for positive change, highlighting education's transformative power in fostering a sustainable and equitable world. Digital reading broadens student access to a vast array of educational materials, such as textbooks, scholarly articles, and online resources. Consequently, students, irrespective of their socio-economic status or geographic location, can access diverse educational materials, thereby enhancing their learning and educational outcomes. Digital reading platforms often provide interactive learning experiences that can improve comprehension and retention, leading to better academic performance. Additionally, digital reading materials are more cost-effective than traditional printed ones. Students can access these materials anytime, anywhere, using various devices like smartphones, tablets, or laptops. Moreover, digital reading helps students develop critical thinking and information literacy skills, including evaluating information sources, distinguishing credible information from misinformation, and analyzing complex texts. Importantly, adopting digital reading reduces paper consumption and other resources associated with traditional printing, supporting environmental sustainability.

3. Review of Literature

A comprehensive review of the literature on students' digital reading habits in India and abroad has been conducted. Researchers such as Abdul Karim et al. (2007), Shabani, Naderikharaji, and Abedi (2011), Ramesh (2012), Kala, Betageri, and Chandrappa (2013), Bajpai (2013), and Divya P. (2018) have focused on students' reading patterns in the current digital environment. Some studies indicated that the time spent on print resources is higher compared to digital resources. For digital reading, most students preferred mobile phones, followed by laptops. The findings also showed that students in Technical and Engineering disciplines read the most e-resources. Abdul Karim et al. (2007) specifically examined the reading habits and attitudes of IT and Arts students, finding that IT students relied more on websites and electronic resources than their Arts counterparts.

Shen (2006), Saravanan and Mary (2007), and He et al. (2012) explored digital reading competency among students, revealing that diverse information resources are used for various scholarly tasks. Online e-resources, including search engines, were most frequently used for complex academic assignments. Social network sites were not typically used for academic tasks, and traditional resources remained equally or more important for certain assignments. Shen's (2006) study noted a shift in college EFL students' reading habits from paper-based to web-based reading. However, Saravanan and Mary (2007) found that teachers relied more on traditional sources, approaching internet information resources similarly to conventional ones.

Research by Singh (2009), Guruprasad and Nikam (2010), Deval (2011), Thanuskodi and Ravi (2011), Bhatt and Rana (2011), Eden and Eshet-Alkalai (2012), Jeong (2012), Bellary and Naik (2013), and Zha, Zhang, and Yan (2014) examined students' preferences for print and digital resources. Many foreign studies found that

students used both e-journals and print journals from libraries and computer centers. Consequently, several studies concluded that e-journals might not fully replace print versions even in the digital age. Singh (2009) recommended that institutions should conduct training and awareness programs for online journal use and install more computer terminals and online journals across disciplines. Guruprasad and Nikam (2010) assessed the impact of reading e-journals on aerospace scientists and engineers in Bangalore. Bhatt and Rana (2011) evaluated the use of e-resources among engineering academics in Rajasthan, finding that e-resources improved academic and professional competency and positively influenced teaching methodology and student ability. Deval (2011) observed that digital resources have gained a strong presence alongside print resources. Eden and Eshet-Alkalai (2012) discovered that digital readers completed tasks faster without a decrease in performance compared to print readers. Jeong (2012) found that while students were satisfied with e-books, they still preferred paper books.

Studies by Dykeman (2005), Shaikh and Chaparro (2005), Chowdappa, Chandrashekhara, and Ramasesh (2009), Loan (2011), Ajayi, Shorunke, and Aboyade (2014), Saaid and Wahab (2014), and Soroya and Ameen (2016) examined the influence of digital resources on reading. Most of these studies noted a transformation in reading behavior, particularly among youth, due to the impact of digital media accessible via the internet. Many studies highlighted that the advent of advanced media and hypertext has altered reading behavior.

4.   Statement of the Problem

A Study on Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences among the College Students in Kamrup (Metro) District of Assam.

5.   Objectives of the Study

1.   To study the Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences between male and female college students in Kamrup (M) district.

2.   To find out the correlation, if any exists, between Digital Reading habits and Digital Reading Preferences among college students in Kamrup (M) district.

3.   To find out the difference, if any exists, in Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences among the college students of Arts, Commerce and Science at Kamrup (M) district.

6.   Hypothesis of the Study

1.   There is no significant difference in Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences between male and female students in Kamrup (M) district.

2.   There is no significant correlation between Digital Reading habits and Digital Reading Preferences among college students in Kamrup (M) district.

3.   There is no significant difference in Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences among the students of Arts, Commerce and Science in Kamrup (M) district.

7. Methodology

This study employs the descriptive survey method. The independent variables are gender and academic disciplines, while the dependent variables are digital reading habits and preferences. The study focuses on 20 provincialized general degree colleges in the Kamrup (Metro) district. From these, five colleges were chosen based on their arts, science, and commerce streams, resulting in a sample of 200 students pursuing B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com degrees, selected proportionally. Gender was a key criterion in the student selection process. Data were collected via Google Forms using semi-structured schedules specifically designed for the study. The collected data were analyzed using t-Test and ANOVA.

8. Results and Discussions

Following data compilation, the information was entered into SPSS software, version 22, for descriptive analysis of the quantitative data. The study's findings are outlined below. Analysis of responses regarding the devices used for digital learning reveals that, as shown in Table 1, 64% of students used smartphones, 2% used laptops, and 23.5% used both smartphones and laptops for digital reading.

Table 1: Devices used for digital reading

Types of Devices	Frequency	Percentage
Smartphone	128	64.0
Laptop	4	2.0
Both Smartphone & Laptop	47	23.5

After analyzing the responses regarding how often students engaged in digital reading (such as e-books, articles, blogs, etc.) for academic purposes using digital devices, Table 2 indicates that 40% of students engaged several times a week, 23.5% engaged daily, 35% engaged once a week, 16% engaged rarely, and 3% never engaged in digital reading.

Table 2: Students engaged in digital reading for leisure or personal interest

Response	Total Frequency(200)	Percentage
Daily	47	23.5
Several times a week	80	40.0
Once a week	35	17.5
Rarely	32	16.0
Never	06	3.0

After analyzing the responses on the types of digital reading materials most frequently used by students for academic studies, Table 3 reveals that students primarily used social media (10.5%), lecture notes/slides shared (7.5%), and e-books (5%).

Table 3: Types of digital reading materials used the most

Types of Digital Reading Materials	Total Frequency(200)	Percentage
E-books	10	5.0%
Lecture notes/slide shared digitally	15	7.5%
Social media	21	10.5%

After analyzing the responses regarding students' methods of reading digital resources, Table 4 indicates that 48% of students read online, 12% read offline, 5% use printouts, and 22% utilize all these methods for digital reading.

Table 4: How students read digital resources

Most Preferred Modes	Frequency	Percentage
Online	97	48.5
Offline	24	12.0
By taking printout	10	5.0
All the above	44	22.0

After analyzing the responses on how students typically take notes or annotate while reading digital content, Table 5 reveals that 33% of students print out the content and write notes by hand, 12% type notes in separate documents, and only 5% prepare notes by highlighting within the digital document.

Table 5: How students usually take notes or annotate while reading digital content

Most Preferred Modes	Frequency	Percentage
Highlighting within the digital document	10	5.0
Printing the content and writing by hand	66	33.0
Typing notes in a separate document	24	12

After analysing the responses on the preference of students reading short-form content (e.g., articles, blog posts) or long-form content (e.g., textbooks, lengthy articles) digitally, Table 6 shows that 55% students preferred both reading short-form content or long-form content and 28.5% students prefer short-form content.

Table 6: Preference of reading short-form content (e.g., articles, blog posts) or long-form content (e.g., textbooks, lengthy articles) digitally

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
No preference	21	10.5
Short form	57	28.5
Long form	12	6.0
Both short & long form	110	55.0

After analysing the responses on types of content read digitally by students, Table 6 shows that 9% students read social media posts and 17% read textbooks.

Table 6: Types of content read digitally by students

Modes	Frequency	Percentage
Textbooks	17	8.5
Academic articles	05	2.5
Novels and fiction	05	2.5
News articles	07	3.5
Blogs or online articles	01	0.5
Social media posts	18	9.0

Upon analyzing the responses regarding the types of digital resources most beneficial for students, Table 7 illustrates that 11% of students found online video lectures beneficial, 7% found educational websites beneficial, and 4% found online textbooks beneficial.

Table 7: Types of digital resources found the most beneficial for students

Modes	Frequency	Percentage
Online textbooks	08	4.0
Educational websites	14	7.0
E-books	03	1.5
Online research journals and databases	02	1.0
Educational apps	06	3.0
Online video lectures	22	11.0

8.1. Results on Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences between male and female college students in Kamrup (M) district

Following an analysis of the data concerning Digital Reading Habits among male and female college students in Kamrup (M) district and computing the 't' value (.014), Table 8 indicates that there is no significant difference between male and female students in their digital reading habits.

Similarly, after scrutinizing the data on Digital Reading Preferences among male and female college students in Kamrup (M) district and computing the 't' value (-.869), Table 8 reveals that there is no significant difference between male and female students in their digital reading preferences.

Table 8: Difference in Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preference between Male and Female students

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean difference	t	df	P-value
Digital Reading Habit	Male	64	29.9062	7.28495	.01654	.014	198	.989
	Female	136	29.8897	7.80282				
Digital Reading Preference	Male	64	36.1875	5.40392	-.62868	-.869	198	.386

8.2. Results on the Correlation between Digital Reading habits and Digital Reading Preferences among college students in Kamrup (M) district

Upon analyzing the data regarding the correlation between Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences among college students in Kamrup (M) district and computing the Pearson Correlation value (.391), Table 9 indicates a significant correlation between the two variables at the 0.01 level of significance. Digital reading habits appear to motivate students to adopt specific digital reading preferences, and vice versa.

Table 9: Correlation between Digital Reading habit and Digital Reading Preference

Digital Reading	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Pearson	Correlation P-Value
Digital Reading Habit	200	29.8950	7.62263	.391**	0.000
Digital Reading Preference	200	36.6150	4.76870		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

8.3. Results on Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences among the college students of Arts, Commerce and Science at Kamrup (M) district

According to Table 8, it is evident that there is no notable distinction in Digital Reading Habits (F value- 2.576) and Digital Reading Preferences (.268) among students majoring in Arts, Commerce, and Science within Kamrup (M) district.

Table 10: Differences of Digital Reading Habits and Digital Reading Preferences Among the students of Arts, Commerce and Science

Digital Reading	Streams	N	Mean	SD		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P Value
Digital Reading Habit	Arts	105	29.9429	8.24251	Between Groups	294.732	2	147.366	2.576	.079
	Commerce	22	26.6364	8.81311	Within Groups	11268.063	197	57.198		
	Science	73	30.8082	5.97601	Total	11562.795	199			
	Total	200	29.8950	7.62263						
Digital Reading Prefer-ence	Arts	105	36.3810	4.73810	Between Groups	12.296	2	6.148	.268	.765
	Commerce	22	36.9545	5.81031	Within Groups	4513.059	197	22.909		
	Science	73	36.8493	4.51747	Total	4525.355	199			
	Total	200	36.6150	4.76870						

9. Conclusion

In the wake of the digital revolution and the evolving educational landscape, understanding the digital reading habits and preferences among college students has become imperative. This study aimed to shed light on these aspects among college students in the Kamrup (Metro) District of Assam, with the overarching goal of contributing to the enhancement of educational outcomes and promoting lifelong learning opportunities in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) set by UNESCO.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the digital reading behavior of college students in the study area. It was observed that a significant majority of students prefer using smartphones for digital reading, highlighting the ubiquitous presence of mobile devices in facilitating access to digital content. Additionally, the study revealed that students engage in digital reading activities frequently, with a notable preference for accessing educational materials such as e-books, lecture notes, and social media for academic purposes.

One of the noteworthy findings is the correlation between digital reading habits and preferences, indicating that students who engage more in digital reading tend to have specific preferences for digital content. This underscores the importance of fostering digital reading habits to cultivate a preference for utilizing digital resources effectively for learning purposes.

Furthermore, the study did not find significant differences in digital reading habits and preferences between male and female students, emphasizing the inclusivity of digital reading as a learning tool irrespective of gender. Similarly, no significant disparities were observed across different academic streams, namely Arts,

Commerce, and Science, indicating a uniform pattern of digital reading behavior among students regardless of their academic disciplines.

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of digital reading in promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, as advocated by SDG4. It is imperative for educational institutions to recognize the importance of digital literacy and provide the necessary infrastructure and support to encourage digital reading habits among students. By embracing digital reading, students can access a vast array of educational resources, enhance their learning experiences, and contribute to environmental sustainability through reduced paper consumption.

10. References

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