

IMPACT OF INTERNET ON READING HABITS OF THE NET GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Fayaz Ahmad Loan
Documentation Officer,
Centre of Central Asian Studies,
University of Kashmir, Srinagar (J&K), India

ABSTRACT

Reading in the 21st century networked society is no longer confined to print reading. The printed publications were the main medium for traditional reading culture. The Internet has come to forefront that changes the traditional reading habits of the readers. People nowadays tend to rely more on electronic-based resources (such as e-books, e-papers, e-zines, e-journals, e-mails, e-videos, e-games, e-images, e-maps, e-cards, etc.) than paper based resources (such as books, newspapers, magazines, journals, letters, snail mails, cards and postcards, pictures, etc.). These electronic sources have, fully or partially, entered in reading habits of the netizens. The youth especially students, who have opened their eyes in full bloom of electronic revolution, adopt these sources most of all. This close association of students and Internet is supposed to greatly influence their reading culture. Therefore, the study has been conducted with the purpose to identify the impact of Internet on reading habits of the Net generation students. The student population belongs to the colleges of the Kashmir Valley, Jammu & Kashmir (India). The survey method was used to conduct the study and questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. The stratified random sampling technique was employed to choose the students. The results of study reveal that Internet has increased access to information, use of foreign sources, contacts with worldwide readers and time spent on reading, and have decreased dependence on print sources, contacts with print sources, reading in local languages and reading of books. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that Internet is a mixed blessing for traditional reading culture.

KEYWORDS

Reading Habits; Reading Culture; Internet Reading; Web Reading; Online Reading; Electronic Reading; Digital Reading

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the oldest habits of human civilization and possibly the only one without a worthy substitute. Reading has been passion of the greatest personalities of all times. Humans have been reading since ages and thus words of knowledge have been passed on through generations. One of the first documentary sources for reading was manuscript, however, accessible to only creamy layer of the society. Later, the arrival of Gutenberg printing press ended such discrimination by making the printed word available to all. The Gutenberg printing press brought drastic changes to the fundamentally oral society of the day. It was certainly a great jump in humanity's onward march and the beginning of transformation from oral society to reading society. Today, the emergence of the Internet has created an extraordinary change in all spheres of the society. Initially developed for scientific research community by the Department of Defence, United States of America (Cheung & Huang, 2005), Internet has now crossed more than 1.7 billion users. In the first four years, the number of Internet users reached 50 million and, in contrast, it took Radio 38 years, Television 13 years and the Computer 16 years to reach the same milestone (Lallana, 2003). Yet, the global users are embracing this new technology very fast. Although very difficult to

measure accurately, according to Internet World Stats (2010), the population of worldwide Internet users is 1,733,993,741, almost covering 25.6% of the total world population. Interestingly, a significant proportion of the youth especially college students uses the Internet and is potentially the largest group of the Internet users. They are well versed with the new technologies and their application in present networked society and are commonly known as the *net/second generation* students. The Internet has fixed deep roots in their lives than all other technological innovations. Williamson (2008) reports that out of 18.0 million college students 17.1 million (95.0%) go online at least once in a month during 2007 and out of 18.2 million, 17.4 million (95.7%) use Internet once in a month during 2008 in United States of America (USA). This heavy use of Internet by the students is supposed to greatly influence their reading culture. The predictions are made worldwide that the next generation students may go directly from oral to digital culture and skip over the traditional reading and book culture. However, Internet is a mixed blessing for reading culture and its impact can be positive or negative. The easy availability and accessibility to the reading materials on the Internet is considered as a boon for reading culture and at the same time, the Internet services like online games are considered a threat to traditional print reading. Therefore, there is pressing need to assess the impact of Internet on reading habits.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The studies conducted by various researchers and research organisations in different countries also analyse and predict the impact of Internet on reading. Ramirez (2003) and Liu (2005) reveal that with the growing amount of digital information available, people particularly young adults are found spending more time reading electronic materials. Bjork & Turk (2001) conducted a study to identify how Internet is overtaking the print media and conclude that the average respondent use print and Internet equally (50:50), however, heavy use of the Internet drops with age and the population from 35-45 use Internet slightly more than younger and older colleagues. The Hong Kong Department of Education (2001) reports that more students read books at lower levels whilst at higher levels, more students read electronic information. Li-Bi Shen (2006) conducted a study with the purpose to determine the impact of computer technology on college students reading habits and concludes that college students reading habits change from paper-based to Internet-based reading. The findings depict that 83.9% of students read online information everyday whereas only 31.4% of them read newspapers and 33.1% read magazines daily. The China Research Institute of Publishing Science survey finds that the number of Chinese reading traditional books has fallen while the number reading Internet publications has increased sharply. The results discover that book reading rate was 60.4% in 1999, 51.7% in 2003, and 48.7% in 2005, falling 11% in six years. Although the popularity of book reading continues to fall, online reading has grown rapidly, from 3.7% in 1999 to 18.3% in 2003 to 27.8% in 2005 (People's Daily Online, 2007). Perryman (1997) reports that Americans book reading habits is decreasing as the results of a study show that those who do not read a single book in a year doubled from 1975 to 1990 (8% to 16%). Broddason (2006) argue that there is not only decrease in book reading but overall print reading due to the introduction of Internet. He reports that the percentage of youths reading newspapers daily were 89% in 1968 and in 2003

it was confirmed that only 40% are daily readers of newspapers. The findings of all the studies reveal that Internet has impacted on reading habits positively as well as negatively.

SCOPE

The scope of the present study is limited geographically to the Kashmir Valley. The Valley is the major province of Jammu & Kashmir state consists of ten (10) districts. Academically, the study is limited to the academic college students of the Kashmir Valley. The student population belongs to the faculties of General Science, Computer Science, Business & Commerce, Social Sciences and Humanities covering the youth age group (18-25 years).

OBJECTIVE

The specific objective of the present study, which is basically a part of Ph.D. study, is to identify the impact of Internet on reading habits of the net generation students.

METHODOLOGY

The population of the universe was large and heterogeneous. Therefore, the stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the students. The data was collected using the questionnaire method. Before drafting the questionnaire, the relevant literature was reviewed and analysed which provided some directions in drafting questionnaire. After the survey questionnaire was drafted, it was pre-tested with 30 students. The questionnaire was then modified according to the result of the pre-test. Later, the data was collected from 302 college students who use Internet. The questionnaire was administered personally to ensure the excellent response rate as well as to avoid any misunderstanding while providing responses. The data is presented in table and then, interpreted and analysed in detailed summary.

DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Table 1. Impact of Internet sources on reading habits

Impact on Reading Habits	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Increases ACCESS to information sources	146/302 (48.34)	156/302 (51.66)	00/302 (0.00)	00/302 (0.00)
Increases use of FOREIGN sources	137/302 (45.36)	145/302 (48.01)	20/302 (6.62)	00/302 (0.00)
Increases CONTACTS with worldwide readers	171/302 (56.62)	112/302 (37.09)	19/302 (6.29)	00/302 (0.00)
Increases TIME spend on reading	70/302 (23.18)	121/302 (40.07)	76/302 (25.17)	35/302 (11.59)
Decreases dependence on PRINT sources	68/302 (22.52)	144/302 (47.68)	69/302 (22.85)	21/302 (6.95)
Decreases CONTACTS with print sources	47/302 (15.56)	117/302 (38.74)	103/302 (34.11)	35/302 (11.59)
Decreases reading in LOCAL languages	78/302 (25.83)	127/302 (42.05)	75/302 (24.83)	22/302 (7.28)
Decreases reading of BOOKS	74/302 (24.50)	139/302 (46.03)	58/302 (19.21)	31/302 (10.26)

ACCESS to information sources

All (100%) the students believe that Internet *increases access to information sources* in which 48.34% students are strongly agree and 51.66% are agree (Table 1). Certainly, Internet increases access to information sources and bridges the traditional gaps between user and information. The need is to open more Internet access points like cyber cafes, community information centres, and information kiosks at needy places to convert non-users into users and give them unrestricted access to information. Moreover, Internet not only provides access to online information sources but increases access to traditional sources as well through electronic marketing techniques like the Web based Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs).

Use of FOREIGN sources

The majority of the students (93.37%) also believe that Internet *increases access to foreign sources* (Table 1). In print media, it was very difficult to access foreign sources as the libraries were mostly building their collection from local sources. In online environment, more foreign sources are available for readers at a click away. This is the prominent reason for increasing the use of foreign sources.

CONTACTS with worldwide readers

The majority of the students (93.71%) also believe that Internet *increases contacts with worldwide readers* in which 56.62% are strongly agree and 37.09% are agree (Table 1). The communications services (like e-mail, instant messaging), Web 2.0 services (like facebook, MySpace) and ning network services available on the Internet make it easy to communicate with the worldwide readers. The Web 2.0 sources like blogs and wikis also increases the participative reading.

TIME spend on reading

The 63.25% students strongly agree/agree that Internet *increases time spend on reading* whereas 36.75% strongly disagree/disagree (Table 1). The improved access to relevant information through Internet has increased students time spend on reading. The students retrieve, with a single click, many hits related to his/her field of interest easily and each hit seems to be more useful and interesting than another. The reading of the relevant hits, one after the other, definitely increases time spends on reading. However, it is also possible that students may be doing other things during surfing the Internet like online chatting, playing games and watching videos. All these activities may be responsible for decreasing time spend on reading.

Dependence on PRINT sources

Above 70% of the students strongly agree/agree that Internet *decreases dependence on print sources* whereas below 30% strongly disagree/ disagree (Table 1). The Internet provides access to a wide range of online sources available in any part of globe related to various branches of knowledge and hence decreases dependence on print sources.

CONTACTS with print sources

The 54.30% students strongly agree/agree that Internet *decreases contacts with print sources* and 45.70% students do not feel so (Table 1). The findings make clear that the new

generation students depend on online as well as print sources. Therefore, libraries need to build a hybrid collection to satisfy the reading needs of all.

Reading in LOCAL languages

The 67.88% students believe that Internet *decreases reading in local languages* whereas 32.12% do not believe so (Table 1). The Internet mostly contains information in prominent languages like English, Russian, French, Chinese etc. and very less information is available in regional or local languages. This is perhaps the basic reason that Internet surfers decrease reading in local languages. The authors or copyright owners should publish the local publications in electronic form to reach maximum number of readers. This will definitely increase the sales of their publication. Moreover, it is the need of the day to digitise the best collection of all languages and create a digital library of local material and make it available on the Web for the local readers. In India, the *Sahita Academy of India* and other state level cultural academies have to play a very important role in this whole process to preserve and develop the local culture in electronic era.

Reading of BOOKS

Above 70% of the students strongly agree/agree that Internet *decreases reading of books* whereas below 30% are strongly disagree/disagree. The possible reasons are lack of awareness about online book collection; difficult to read a book in a single attempt; unsuitable reading screen; and physical discomforts. There is need to take certain steps to increase book reading during Internet surfing like: to create awareness about book repositories, online libraries and book projects; to create a separate search options for books like Google Book Search in all famous search engines; to digitise the best books from old collection and make them available for users; to have the electronic edition of every new publication available on the Web; to install the book reading software like *kindle* of *Amazon* which helps to make online book reading easy and to design the user friendly screens. All these efforts together will help to increase reading of books while Internet surfing.

CONCLUSION

The overall analyses of the data shows that the reading habits of the new generation readers are in transition- slowly shifting:

From	To
➤ Restricted Access	Unrestricted Access
➤ Local sources	Worldwide sources
➤ Print sources	Online sources
➤ Local languages	English language
➤ Individual reading	Participative reading
➤ Less time spent on reading	More time spent on reading

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