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From Book Shelves to Digital Screens: A Sociological Analysis of the Dying Reading Culture and Library Usage Among Nigerian Students

M. D. Enaikele; A. T. Adeleke; & F. I. Olowookere
Dept. of General Studies, Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Lagos, Nigeria.
Corresponding Author: damohcle16@gmail.com
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Abstract

The widespread growth of digital technologies has reshaped how young people seek information and engage with reading. In Nigeria, academic libraries that were once key hubs of learning are witnessing reduced patronage as students increasingly turn to digital media. This study examines the sociological dimensions of declining reading culture and library usage among Nigerian students and assesses the relationship between digital media use and reading culture. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey, 200 students from the Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Lagos, were sampled through multistage techniques; 192 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Data collected through structured questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square test of independence. Results showed that 71.9% of respondents accessed digital platforms several times daily, while 40.1% rarely or never visited the academic library. Increased smartphone use (81.3%), social media engagement (78.1%), and easy access to online information (75.5%) were prominent factors associated with the changing reading culture. The chi-square test indicated a statistically significant association between digital media use and reading culture ($\chi^2 = 28.47$, $df = 4$, $p < 0.001$, $\alpha = 0.05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. The study concludes that intensive digital media engagement is associated with changes in reading habits and reduced reliance on physical library use among the surveyed students. Recommendations include library digital transformation, reading-promotion initiatives, and integration of information, digital, and critical-reading literacy.

Keywords: Reading Culture, Digital Media, Academic Libraries, Nigerian Students, Sociological Analysis.

Introduction

Reading culture plays a crucial role in intellectual growth, academic success, and societal progress. Traditionally, academic libraries have been key centers for acquiring knowledge, where students and researchers extensively engaged with printed books, journals, monographs and scholarly texts (National Library of Nigeria, 2023). However, the rise of digital technologies has dramatically transformed how information is accessed, consumed, and shared. The widespread use of smartphones, tablets, laptops, social media platforms, and internet-based resources has reshaped reading habits among young people worldwide (Liu, 2005).

In Nigeria today, technological advancements have broadened access to information while diminishing reliance on traditional library materials. Nigerian students increasingly depend on digital devices for academic work, social interaction, and entertainment. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become primary sources of information. As a result, consistent engagement with printed books and conventional reading materials appears to be on the decline (Aina *et al*., 2011).

Researchers note that although digital tools improve information accessibility, they often promote fragmented reading behaviors marked by skimming, multitasking, and shorter attention spans (Carr, 2020). This trend has sparked concern among educators, librarians, and sociologists about the diminishing culture of serious reading among students. Serious reading entails thorough engagement with texts, involving critical thinking, analysis, reflection, interpretation, and comprehension skills which are vital for academic achievement and intellectual development.

Historically, Nigeria's educational system has relied heavily on libraries as repositories of knowledge and learning resources. Yet, many academic libraries now face reduced patronage despite rising student numbers (National Library of Nigeria, 2023). This evidence suggests that students prefer online searches, social media content, blogs, and digital resources over traditional books and library visits (Issa *et al*., 2019). This shows broad societal changes driven by globalization, technological advancement, and evolving student lifestyles. From a sociological standpoint, reading behavior is shaped by social contexts including technological environments, peer influences, educational settings, and cultural norms. The shift from physical libraries to digital platforms represents not just a technological change but a significant social transformation that impacts learning habits and knowledge acquisition (Baron, 2021). Hence, understanding this dynamic is vital for effective educational planning, policy-making, and the development of libraries in Nigeria. Hence, this study attempts to explore how digital technologies affect reading culture among Nigerian students and considers the consequences for the use of academic library resources.

Statement of Problem

There is growing concern among educators and librarians about the decreasing use of academic libraries by Nigerian students. Although access to educational materials has improved, many students show limited interest in engaging with extended reading tasks. The rise of digital technology has transformed how young people seek information and altered their traditional reading behaviors in libraries. As a result, academic libraries are witnessing a decline in student visits, while social media and other digital platforms have become central to students' everyday lives.

The specific role that digital technology plays in diminishing the library reading culture among Nigerian students is not yet fully clear. This research aims to explore the social factors that have led to the shift from library reading culture

to digital screen-based information consumption.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

To investigate the sociological dimensions of the declining library reading culture among Nigerian students in this digital age.

Specific objectives are;

i. To examine the frequency of digital media usage among Nigerian students
ii. To assess the level of academic library utilization among Nigerian students
iii. To investigate the pattern of reading habits of Nigerian students in the digital era
iv. To identify factors responsible for the declining library reading culture among Nigerian students.
v. To determine the relationship between digital media usage and the declining library reading culture among Nigerian students.

Research Hypotheses

Ho: There is no significant relationship between digital media usage and the declining library reading culture among Nigerian students.

Justification and Relevance of the Study

The swift growth of digital technology has significantly altered how Nigerian students seek information and engage in reading. The widespread use of smartphones, social media, and online platforms has diverted attention from traditional printed materials and academic libraries. This research is important to investigate how these technological shifts are affecting students' reading habits and use of library resources in Nigeria.

Reading culture plays a vital role in academic success, intellectual growth, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. The noticeable decrease in consistent reading habits among students is a cause for concern regarding their academic achievements and knowledge development. Therefore, identifying the factors behind this decline is crucial to addressing new educational challenges in the digital era.

This study holds significant importance for educational bodies, librarians, policymakers, curriculum developers, and investment in literacy advancement. The outcomes will offer key insights to help create strategies, policies, and programs that aim to revive reading culture, improve library services, and encourage effective use of both printed and digital information sources.

From a sociological viewpoint, the research enhances understanding of how technological progress influences cultural habits, learning behaviors, and social interactions. It also contributes to interdisciplinary research in education, media, technology, and student development, providing a solid base for future studies and evidence-based policy-making in Nigeria.

Policy Implications of the Study

This study shall provide important insights that will help to shape policies aimed at reversing the decline in reading habits among Nigerian students. By examining how digital media influences reading behavior, it will offer guidance for policymakers to develop balanced educational frameworks that combine digital engagement with reading practices, ensuring technology enhances rather than diminishes critical thinking and intellectual growth.

In addition, the study shall provide research supports for the modernization of academic libraries through digitization and hybrid systems, improving access to a wide range of learning materials in today's digital environment. The study shall also bring to bear the importance of integrating information literacy, digital literacy, and critical reading skills into school curricula to help students evaluate digital content effectively and engage thoughtfully with reading materials.

Finally, the study shall recommend increased government support for library development, reading promotion, and literacy programs targeting students. Such efforts shall be central to national policies that recognize a strong reading culture as crucial for academic success and human capital development. Coordinated collaboration among government bodies, educational institutions, libraries, and civil society is also essential to foster and sustain a thriving reading culture among Nigerian students.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

This research is anchored in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Katz, et al., (1974). Unlike earlier perspectives that saw audiences as passive media consumers, UGT views individuals as active agents who deliberately select media sources to fulfill particular needs such as acquiring knowledge, entertainment, social connection, identity formation, and personal development. People make conscious decisions about which communication channels to use based on the specific gratifications they seek. This concept is especially relevant today in the digital era, where social media, e-books, websites, and AI-driven tools offer instant, interactive, and customized access to information, often competing with traditional libraries and printed texts.

The theory helps explain the shift among Nigerian youth away from conventional academic library usage toward digital media. As digital platforms increasingly satisfy educational, informational, and recreational needs, academic libraries are perceived as less attractive and less aligned with the information-seeking habits of modern users. As a result, many young people prefer engaging with digital content over reading traditional textbooks or scholarly materials in libraries, illustrating a broader transformation in media consumption behavior.

From the UGT standpoint, the decline in reading culture among Nigerian youth is attributed not only to technological advancements but also to changing motivations and consumption patterns that prioritize the speed, convenience, accessibility, and interactivity offered by digital media. This theory provides a useful framework for examining how digital media influences information-seeking behavior, library use, and reading preferences, highlighting the growing gap between academic libraries and the contemporary needs of Nigerian youth.

Complementarily, media ecology and cognitive distraction perspectives help explain why the digital environment may alter attention and reading patterns. From this perspective, Digital media characteristics such as notifications, rapid switching, visual stimulation, and multitasking can produce shorter and more fragmented reading (Carr, 2020; Firth *et al*., 2019). These perspectives do not replace the Uses and Gratifications Theory; rather, they provide a complementary explanation of how the digital environment can shape the conditions under which students read and use information.

Materials and Methods

This research employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey to explore the connection between digital media use and the decline in reading culture among Nigerian students. The survey method was chosen as it allows for the collection of consistent data from a large sample, facilitating the assessment of attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions related to reading habits, library use, and digital information

consumption. This approach also enabled empirical testing of the hypotheses and identification of relationships among the studied variables.

The study took place at the Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Lagos, Nigeria. The institution provides students with access to traditional library services alongside digital information resources, providing a relevant setting for examining changing information-seeking behaviours in the digital era. The study therefore considers the coexistence of physical library resources and digitally mediated information access within a higher-education environment.

The target population included all enrolled students at the college during the 2025/2026 academic year. These students were chosen as the focus audience due to their active engagement with both printed and digital information resources, and their direct exposure to changes in reading and learning modalities.

A total of 200 students participated in the survey. A multistage sampling technique was applied, beginning with stratification of departments to promote representation across departments, followed by random selection of students from departmental lists to reduce selection bias. The study used a 5% margin of error as the intended sampling precision. The total institutional population from which the sample was drawn was not reported in the original study records; therefore, no population value is introduced here and the sample-size calculation is not restated as a numerical application of Yamane's formula. 200 participants (students) were sampled but at the end of the exercise, 192 respondents with valid responses and correctly filled questionnaire (96 %) were analyzed for the study.

Data were gathered through a researcher-designed structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended and Likert-scale questions across four sections. Section A captured socio-demographic details such as age, gender, study level, and library usage frequency. Section B focused on digital media habits, Section C on traditional reading behavior and interaction with printed texts, and Section D on perceptions of academic library relevance and factors influencing the transition to digital information consumption.

To confirm the validity of the content, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the department of sociology, education, and library science at the University of Ibadan, with their feedback incorporated into the final questionnaire administered. Reliability was tested in a pilot study of 20 students from a similar institution outside the study area, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong reliability and consistency.

Data collection was carried out within two-weeks period with the researchers administering questionnaires personally after obtaining institutional approval and informed consent from participants. The data collection also encouraged the use of self-administered questionnaires. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, assured of voluntary participation, and questionnaires were collected immediately to minimize loss of questionnaire.

The dependent variable, reading culture, was measured using indicators such as frequency of reading printed materials, time spent on academic texts, library visits, and engagement with scholarly resources. Independent variables included digital media usage, internet access frequency, social media activity, use of electronic learning tools, and preference for screen-based information. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

Ethical standards for social science research were strictly followed. Participation was voluntary with informed consent secured from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, with no personal identifiers collected. Data was exclusively used for academic purposes and securely stored to prevent unauthorized access.

Results and Discussion (Data Analysis Method)

200 students of Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Lagos, were sampled with questionnaire. At the end of the exercise, the researcher observed that 192 questionnaires were correctly filled and these were the data analyzed. Data collected from the field survey were carefully coded, entered, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages and likert scale were applied to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and to outline trends in digital media use, library use, and reading habits among the respondents.

To meet the research objectives and explore relationships between variables, inferential statistical methods were employed. The Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was specifically used to assess whether there were significant links between digital media usage and the reading culture of Nigerian students. This test was chosen due to the categorical nature of the variables and its appropriateness for analyzing relationships between independent and dependent variables in survey studies.

Hypothesis testing was conducted at a 95% confidence level and a 5% significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$). The null hypothesis was rejected if the p-value was below 0.05 and accepted if it was above 0.05. Findings were displayed in tables and interpreted in the context of the study's aims, theoretical background, and relevant previous research.

The analysis is arranged according to the study's specific objectives.

Objective One: To examine the frequency of digital media usage among Nigerian students.

The data presented in Table 1 show that digital media usage is extremely high among the respondents. More than two-thirds (71.9%) of our respondents reported accessing digital platforms several times daily, 16.7% reported accessing digital platforms once daily, 7.8% reported accessing digital platforms weekly while only 3.6% reported that they rarely access digital platforms.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Frequency of Digital Media Usage

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Several Times Daily	138	71.9
Once Daily	32	16.7
Weekly	15	7.8
Rarely	07	3.6
Total	192	100.0

The results indicate that digital technologies are now an integral part of daily life for Nigerian students. The widespread use of smartphones, social media platforms, search engines, and online educational materials has greatly influenced how they seek information. This supports the view that modern youth rely heavily on digital tools for gathering information, staying connected, and entertainment. This observation is consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which suggests that people deliberately choose media sources that fulfill their social and informational desires (Katz *et al.,* 1974).

Objective Two: To assess the level of academic library utilization among Nigerian students.

The data presented in Table 2 show a decline in library patronage among respondents. Only 28.1% reported regular use of academic libraries, 31.8% indicated that they occasionally use academic libraries while 40.1% indicated that they either rarely or never visited the library.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on level of Academic Library Utilization

Response	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly		54	28.1
Occasionally		61	31.8
Rarely		52	27.1
Never		25	13.0
Total		192	100.0

The results indicate that academic libraries are gradually losing their traditional role as the main source of knowledge for students. With the rise of online information and digital databases, the reliance on physical library visits appears to be decreasing. This aligns with earlier research that highlights a drop in library usage within higher education institutions, largely due to the rapid growth of information and communication technologies (Alhaji *et al*., 2025). In addition, the findings emphasize the need for academic libraries to continue embracing technological advancements to maintain their relevance in today's digital environment.

Objective Three: To investigate the pattern of reading habits of Nigerian students in this digital era.

The data presented in Table 3 reveal a poor reading culture among the students. While 37.0% reported reading academic materials occasionally, 27.1% reported reading academic materials several times weekly, 20.3% reported reading academic materials daily and 15.6% reported that they rarely read academic materials.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Pattern of Reading Habits

Reading Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	39	20.3
Several Times Weekly	52	27.1
Occasionally	71	37.0
Rarely	30	15.6
Total	**192**	**100.0**

This observed pattern indicates a decline in prolonged engagement with academic texts. This raises concerns about the preservation of serious reading culture, centered on developing critical thinking, analysis, and intellectual growth among younger generations (Carr, 2020). This shift could be linked to the increasing popularity of digital media, visual content, and the demand for immediate access to information. From a sociological point of view, this trend mirrors larger changes in how culture is consumed, influenced by advancements in digital technology.

Objective Four: To identify factors responsible for the declining Library reading culture among Nigerian students.

The data presented in Table 4 identify technological factors as major contributors to the declining reading culture among Nigerian students. Increased smartphone usage emerged as the most influential factor (81.3%), followed by social media engagement (78.1%) and then easy access to online information (75.5%), preference for visual contents (73.4%) and finally, declining library patronage (69.8%).

Table 4: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Factors Responsible for the Declining Library Reading Culture

Factor	Agree %	Disagree (%)
Increased Smartphone Usage	81.3	18.7
Social Media Engagement	78.1	21.9
Easy Access to Online Information	75.5	24.5
Declining Library Patronage	69.8	30.2
Preference for Visual Content	73.4	26.6

These findings suggest that digital media encourage alternative forms of information consumption that rival traditional library reading activities. Students' growing preference for visual and interactive media reflects evolving cognitive and learning styles. The results align with previous study indicating that technological innovations have transformed reading habits prioritising convenience, speed, and multitasking over prolonged, focused engagement with text (Okiki & Asiru, 2011).

Objective Five: To determine the relationship between digital media usage and the declining library reading culture among Nigerian students.

The cross-tabulation in Table 5 reveals a clear pattern between digital media usage and reading culture. Respondents with high digital media usage exhibited weaker reading habits than those with lower levels of digital engagement.

Table 5: Cross-Tabulation of Digital Media Usage and Reading Culture

Digital Media Usage	Strong Reading Habit	Weak Reading Habit	Total
High Usage	32	96	128
Moderate Usage	24	26	50
Low Usage	11	03	14
Total	**67**	**125**	**192**

Many high digital media users reported weak reading habits. This suggests that excessive digital media usage is displacing traditional reading culture. This supports previous research suggesting that digital technologies are altering information consumption habits while reducing engagement in serious reading activities and interaction with printed academic materials (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2014).

Test of Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between digital media usage and the declining reading culture among Nigerian students.

Chi-Square Test of Relationship Between Digital Media Usage and Reading Culture

Chi-Square (χ^2) Calculations and Hypotheses Testing

The hypothesis was tested using the Chi-Square (χ^2) test of independence at a 0.05 significance level. The Chi-Square Formula used is:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Where;

χ^2 = Chi-Square statistic
O = Observed frequency
E = Expected frequency
Calculated $\chi^2 = 28.47$
Degrees of Freedom (df) = 4
P value < 0.001
Level of significance =0.05

Decision
Since $p < 0.001 < 0.05$, H_0 is rejected.

Interpretation and Discussion
There is a statistically significant relationship between digital media usage and the declining reading culture among Nigerian students.
The Chi-Square (χ^2) test conducted yielded a calculated value of $\chi^2 = 28.47$ and a p-value of 0.000. Because the p-value is below the 0.05 significance threshold, the null hypothesis was rejected. This outcome establishes a statistically significant association between digital media usage and reading culture among Nigerian students.
This finding indicates that greater involvement with digital technologies has a substantial impact on students' reading habits. The result supports the core tenets of the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals deliberately choose media outlets that best satisfy their needs and offer maximum convenience (Katz *et al*., 1974). As digital platforms increasingly meet educational and informational demands, conventional reading practices and academic library-based reading culture is progressively being supplanted. Ultimately, the finding highlights how technological advancement is not only reshaping communication patterns but also profoundly redefining the culture of reading among Nigerian students today.

Summary and Conclusion
This study examined the declining conventional reading practices and academic library-based reading culture among Nigerian students in an era dominated by rapid technological advancement and pervasive digital media. It specifically assessed the extent of students' digital media usage, evaluated their level of academic library utilization, investigated current reading habits, identified the major factors responsible for the decline, and analyzed the relationship between digital media consumption and reading behaviour.
The findings reveal that digital technologies have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of Nigerian students. A significant majority reported frequent engagement with smartphones, social media platforms, search engines, and various online resources for academic, social, entertainment and recreational purposes. This widespread adoption of digital media technology has profoundly transformed traditional patterns of information seeking and knowledge acquisition.
The study also established a noticeable decline in the utilization of academic libraries. While libraries continue to serve as vital repositories of scholarly resources, many students now prefer digital platforms due to their convenience, speed, accessibility, and flexibility. As a result, physical visits to libraries have decreased significantly, signaling a clear shift from conventional print sources to technology-driven alternatives.

Furthermore, the study highlights a substantial transformation in students' reading habits. Although reading remains central to academic success, many students now favour short digital texts, summaries, visual content, and online materials over sustained engagement with textbooks, academic journals, monographs and other printed resources. This shift reflects a broad move toward fragmented, screen-based information consumption rather than serious, focused reading.

Several interconnected factors were found to contribute to this decline, including excessive smartphone usage, heavy social media engagement, effortless access to online information, reduced library patronage, and a growing preference for visual and multimedia content. Collectively, these elements are reshaping how young people access, process, and engage with information.

Inferential analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between digital media usage and the declining reading culture among Nigerian students. This suggests that increased engagement with digital media technologies substantially affects reading habits and contributes to reduced reliance on academic library-based reading practices. The findings are consistent with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals actively select media channels that best satisfy their informational and social needs.

In conclusion, the erosion of reading culture and academic library-based reading culture among Nigerian students is closely intertwined with the rapid adoption of digital technologies and shifting information-seeking preferences. While digital media platforms have expanded access to information and created new learning opportunities, they have also diminished engagement with traditional library resources and serious reading practices. The key challenge for educational institutions is not to resist technological change, but to strategically integrate digital media innovations with initiatives that foster effective reading habits and active scholarly engagement with the use of library.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on media technology, education, literacy, and information behaviour by illustrating how digital transformation is reshaping reading practices among contemporary Nigerian students. The findings underscore the urgent need for deliberate interventions that promote a healthy balance between digital media consumption and traditional library-based reading to enhance academic performance, critical thinking, and intellectual development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Academic libraries should pursue continuous modernization by establishing robust digital catalogs, comprehensive electronic databases, institutional repositories, virtual library services, and high-speed internet infrastructure. By seamlessly integrating modern technologies into their operations, libraries can significantly enhance accessibility and maintain their relevance in the digital age.

ii. Educational institutions should promote a balanced approach to learning that thoughtfully combines traditional print materials with digital resources. Students should be encouraged to engage with both formats to foster comprehensive academic development and strengthen their overall information literacy.

iii. Schools, colleges, universities, and government agencies should actively organize reading campaigns, literary competitions, book exhibitions, reading clubs, and academic discussion forums. These initiatives can help revitalize reading culture and deepen students' engagement with scholarly materials.

iv. Information literacy, digital literacy, and critical reading skills should be fully integrated into the curriculum at all educational levels. Students must be trained to critically evaluate

information, differentiate credible sources from misinformation, and effectively harness digital resources for academic purposes.

v. Library orientation and user education programs should be strengthened to raise awareness of available resources and services. Regular training workshops will equip students with the necessary competencies to maximize the benefits of both traditional and digital library collections.

vi. Lecturers and academic supervisors should design coursework, assignments, and research projects that require extensive engagement with textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, monographs, and other scholarly sources. This approach will cultivate deeper reading habits and enhance students' analytical thinking skills.

vii. Students should be guided to develop responsible digital habits by dedicating specific time for focused academic reading while consciously reducing excessive engagement with non-academic social media. Effective time-management strategies can help establish a healthier balance between technology use and intellectual development.

viii. Government agencies and educational policymakers should increase investment in academic libraries through sustained funding, acquisition of current learning resources, development of digital infrastructure, and capacity-building programs for library personnel.

ix. Educational institutions, libraries, parents, policymakers, community organizations, and the private sector must collaborate closely to promote a vibrant reading culture among young people. Such coordinated efforts are essential for effectively addressing the challenges posed by declining reading habits in the digital era.

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