

The degradation of traditional english book reading habits among teenagers as an impact of digital culture influence

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Abstract

This study aims to explicitly determine how digital culture influences and contributes to the degradation of traditional English book reading habits among teenagers in Alue Pineung Village, East Langsa District. The rise of digital media in the era of Industry 5.0 has transformed the way adolescents access information and acquire knowledge. Teenagers have become accustomed to brief, fast-paced digital content, which has gradually displaced the habit of reading physical books. To examine this phenomenon, the study employed a descriptive qualitative method using observations, interviews, and questionnaires as data collection techniques, and the data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings reveal that digital culture has significantly contributed to the decline in teenagers' interest in reading printed English books. Most respondents prefer digital reading materials because they are more practical, faster to access, and visually appealing. The contribution of this research lies in providing a deeper understanding of how digital exposure reshapes literacy behavior in rural contexts, highlighting the shift from deep, reflective reading to more superficial and instant information consumption. This study offers valuable insight for educators and policymakers to design literacy strategies that balance digital engagement with the preservation of traditional reading practices.

Keywords: *Degradation; Reading Habits; Traditional; Digital Culture; Teenagers*

Introduction

In the era of Digital 5.0, technological advancements have brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including the ways people acquire, process, and utilize information. One of the most notable transformations can be observed in reading habits, especially among teenagers who are increasingly immersed in digital media. Traditionally, reading has been associated with deep comprehension, sustained attention, and reflective thinking through the use of printed books. However, the rapid integration of digital platforms has shifted this orientation, fostering a fast-paced pattern of information consumption, where readers tend to grasp only the surface meaning of texts without deeper reflection. This shift is not merely a change in medium but a transformation in cognitive engagement and literacy behavior.

A growing body of literature across various contexts has illustrated how digital media reshapes reading patterns. At the national level, Pramesti and Irwansyah (2021) found that the increasing use of digital platforms has reduced students' motivation for deep reading. Abbas (2023) highlighted that while digital reading offers convenience, it often results in shallow comprehension due to the emphasis on speed over depth. Milavandia and Hariyanto (2024) similarly reported that teenagers now spend less time reading printed materials and more time interacting with social media and online articles that are brief and instantly accessible. These findings indicate a fundamental transformation in how reading is perceived and practiced in the digital age.

At the global level, several international studies echo similar patterns. Kovalova (2024) revealed that social media has increasingly become a new space for teenagers to consume short and light reading materials, contributing to a reduced interest in more in-depth literature. Yerli and Akman (2023) argued that high levels of technology dependence correlate with weaker attitudes toward reading printed books. Furthermore, research by Sağır and Eraslan (2023) indicated that excessive screen exposure affects adolescents' cognitive development and concentration abilities. Collectively, these studies strengthen the argument that digital transformation has a direct and measurable impact on literacy behavior across cultural contexts.

Despite these valuable insights, existing studies reveal several research gaps. First, most prior research predominantly focuses on urban populations or academic environments, leaving limited understanding of how digital culture influences reading habits in rural communities where access, values, and reading norms may differ. Second, earlier studies tend to emphasize the advantages and accessibility of digital reading but provide insufficient examination of its long-term impact on deep reading, reflective comprehension, and linguistic development—particularly in the context of reading English books, which require higher cognitive effort. Third, research exploring changes in reading behavior from diverse socio-cultural perspectives remains limited, especially in areas where traditional reading practices still coexist with increasing digital exposure.

Based on these gaps, the present study aims to analyze the extent to which digital culture influences the degradation of traditional English book reading habits among teenagers in Alue Pineung Village, East Langsa District. This study also focuses on identifying the social and technological factors that shape teenagers' preferences toward digital reading practices. This research lies in its focus on rural adolescents who are undergoing a transitional phase between traditional literacy values and the rapid expansion of digital culture—an area that has received little academic attention. By examining this population, the study provides new empirical evidence on how digital culture reshapes literacy behavior outside urban contexts and contributes to the broader debate on the sustainability of deep reading practices in the digital era.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in constructivist literacy theory, which posits that reading behavior is shaped through interactions between individuals and their socio-cultural environment. The findings are expected to contribute both empirically and theoretically to the understanding of how digital culture shapes literacy behavior among adolescents, particularly in contexts where traditional reading practices remain culturally significant. Through this lens, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how technological transformations influence the cognitive, social, and behavioral dimensions of reading in contemporary society.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the meanings and experiences underlying adolescents' reading habits in the context of digital culture. Qualitative inquiry is suitable for understanding social phenomena through deep interpretation and contextual description (Subakti, 2023). The research was guided by a constructivist paradigm, which views reality as multiple, subjective, and shaped by individuals' social experiences (Rakhmat & Ibrahim, 2016; Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Within this paradigm, knowledge is constructed through interaction between the researcher and participants rather than discovered independently. Methodologically, constructivism emphasizes reflective and interpretive processes, making techniques such as observation, interviews, and thematic analysis appropriate for capturing participants' perspectives (Kuswarno, 2010).

Participants

The participants of this study were adolescents residing in Alue Pineung Village, East Langsa District, selected through purposive sampling, a technique that allows researchers to intentionally choose individuals who can best provide relevant and information-rich data (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002). A total of 100 teenagers participated by completing the questionnaire, and several of them were further involved in in-depth interviews based on their active engagement with digital media and their familiarity with reading English-language materials. This rural setting was selected intentionally to capture the experiences of adolescents who navigate both traditional literacy practices and the growing influence of digital culture.

Data Collection

Data for this study were gathered using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and questionnaires. Data collection is a crucial phase in research, as it ensures the acquisition of accurate and relevant information needed to address the research objectives (Iba, 2023, p. 241). Observation was conducted to examine adolescents' reading behaviours in their natural environment, focusing on how frequently they read, the duration

of their reading activities, and their preference for digital or printed media. This process followed a participant-observer approach, enabling the researcher to interact directly with the context being studied while using structured observation guides to maintain consistency and relevance (Iba, 2023, p. 242) .

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' perceptions, motivations, and experiences regarding reading practices, allowing respondents the flexibility to elaborate while still guiding the discussion toward key themes (Iba, 2023, p. 244) . In addition, questionnaires were distributed to 100 adolescents to obtain descriptive data on their reading preferences, levels of digital exposure, and engagement with English reading materials. The combination of these three techniques provided a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the phenomenon, ensuring that both behavioural patterns and subjective experiences were adequately captured.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the principles of qualitative inquiry, which involves a systematic process of organizing, interpreting, and making sense of data obtained from interviews, observations, and questionnaires. The primary goal of qualitative data analysis is to structure the collected information so that it becomes meaningful and communicable to others (Saleh, 2017, p. 80) . This study employed the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which conceptualizes data analysis as a concurrent and cyclical process involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014, pp. 12–14) . During data condensation, the researcher selected, simplified, and organized the raw data from field notes, questionnaires, and interview transcripts to focus on information relevant to the research objective—specifically, the influence of digital media on the degradation of traditional reading habits among adolescents. The condensed data were then grouped into thematic categories that reflected emerging patterns across participants' responses.

The second stage involved the structured presentation of data through descriptive narratives supported by key quotations from participants, enabling clearer interpretation of connections across themes. Data were organized into meaningful categories such as reading motivation, emotional responses, digital engagement, and perceptions of traditional reading. This step also included visual and narrative displays to facilitate deeper analysis of how digital culture shapes reading behaviour. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn and verified through iterative comparison between questionnaire results, interview data, and observational findings. Verification involved re-reading transcripts, checking consistency across sources, and consulting supervisory feedback to ensure the credibility and validity of the interpretations. Through this interactive and reflective process, the researcher was able to identify clear patterns showing how digital media use contributes to the decline of traditional English book reading among adolescents in the studied context.

Results

The findings of this study were derived from observations, interviews, and questionnaires conducted among adolescents in Alue Pineung Village, East Langsa District. Observational data show a clear shift in reading preferences from printed books to digital media. Approximately 80% of adolescents preferred reading through digital devices, such as smartphones and laptops, while only 20% regularly used printed books . Digital reading activities generally lasted 5–15 minutes, whereas printed reading ranged between 30–60 minutes. Observation notes indicate that adolescents tend to choose digital media because they perceive it as *lebih cepat, praktis, dan mudah diakses*, while printed books require more focus and time, making them less appealing for daily use.

Interview findings reinforce these observations. Most participants stated that they rarely read printed books unless required for school tasks. They preferred reading on digital platforms because printed books were considered "*membosankan*," "*terlalu panjang*," atau "*butuh konsentrasi lebih*." Several participants expressed that reading on their phones feels easier, for example: "*Kalau baca di HP lebih cepat dan gampang cari arti kata*." Other respondents commented that printed books demand higher cognitive effort: "*Baca buku lama selesainya, jadi cepat bosan*." The interview summary table in the data source shows that 4 dari 5 Informants admit that the use of digital media is making them read printed books less and less, although some say that physical books actually help them focus better.

Questionnaire results also support these patterns. A majority of respondents agreed that digital media has reduced the time they spend reading printed materials. For instance, 70 respondents agreed that they prefer to read through digital platforms rather than print books, while 20 disagreed, and 10 were neutral on the statement. Respondents also acknowledged that frequent exposure to social media decreases their motivation to read printed English books. Many admitted that they rarely visit libraries or allocate time for reading long texts because they are more accustomed to short, visual, and fast-paced content.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a strong and consistent shift in adolescents' reading habits toward digital consumption. While digital platforms offer speed, accessibility, and diverse content, these advantages are accompanied by a decline in reading depth, reduced attention span, and decreased interest in printed English books. A minority of adolescents still recognize that printed reading supports better comprehension, but this group represents a small portion of the population, indicating a notable transformation in literacy behaviour driven by digital culture.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the degradation of traditional english book reading habits among teenagers as an impact of digital culture influence in Alue Pineung Village. Observational and interview data consistently indicate that the widespread penetration of digital technology not only reshapes the ways in which individuals obtain information but also affects their cognitive patterns and literacy behaviours. Most adolescents prefer digital media due to their interactive features, practicality, and easy accessibility, whereas reading physical books is increasingly perceived as less appealing and demanding greater effort and concentration.

This phenomenon can be interpreted through Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which posits that individual behaviour is shaped through continuous interaction with social and cultural environments. Adolescents who grow up within digitally saturated surroundings construct literacy behaviours that align with technological culture. Consequently, the act of reading shifts from a deep, reflective activity toward one that is instant, fragmented, and efficiency-oriented. The preference for concise and visually rich content found on digital platforms reinforces the emergence of fast-paced reading practices that prioritize immediate understanding over analytical depth.

These findings are consistent with those of Abbas (2023) and Kolajo & Agbetuyi (2021), who reported that increased reliance on digital media correlates with diminishing deep-reading skills and a weakened interest in printed materials. Adolescents accustomed to rapid information processing tend to experience decreased patience for engaging with long, text-heavy reading materials, particularly printed texts that require sustained attention and cognitive effort.

Nevertheless, the influence of digital culture cannot be regarded solely as negative. When used appropriately, digital media can act as a catalyst for enhancing literacy engagement. The study of Wiratami, Widiastuti, and Elysiana (2023) underscores that digital literacy, when integrated into guided educational activities, can foster improved critical thinking skills and promote productive reading behaviours. This suggests that the degradation of traditional reading habits does not stem from technology per se but from the absence of structured guidance and awareness in utilizing digital tools effectively.

Therefore, schools, families, and communities hold a crucial role in reinforcing constructive reading habits. By cultivating a literacy environment that accommodates digital trends while still emphasizing deep comprehension, educational stakeholders can guide adolescents toward a more balanced literacy culture. Such efforts may include structured digital reading programs, hybrid literacy practices that combine printed and digital materials, and the development of reflective reading strategies tailored to the digital context.

Overall, the findings affirm that the primary challenge in the digital era is not the disappearance of reading culture but the transformation of its form, medium, and cognitive orientation. Adolescents are not abandoning reading; rather, they are adapting to new modes of information consumption shaped by technological advancements. A balanced pedagogical approach—one that harmonizes technological accessibility with reflective and critical reading practices—remains essential to ensuring that the core values of deep literacy continue to be preserved in the evolving digital landscape.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the influence of digital culture on the degradation of traditional English book reading habits among teenagers in Alue Pineung Village, East Langsa District. The research findings clearly demonstrate that digital culture plays a significant role in shifting teenagers' reading behavior from printed books toward digital formats. This shift directly answers the research problem: the strong dominance of digital media—characterized by speed, convenience, and constant accessibility—has resulted in a noticeable decline in teenagers' engagement with physical English books. As digital platforms encourage brief and fast-paced information consumption, the depth, focus, and persistence required for traditional reading practices have gradually diminished. Consequently, teenagers tend to prioritize quick understanding over comprehensive and reflective reading, which affects their ability to deeply process English texts that demand greater concentration.

These results indicate that the degradation of traditional reading habits is not merely caused by reduced interest but is rooted in structural changes in the way adolescents interact with information in the digital age. However, the study also finds that some teenagers still value printed books for their ability to support focus and long-term retention, suggesting that traditional reading practices continue to hold cognitive advantages despite the overwhelming presence of digital media. This reinforces the idea that the primary challenge today is not the disappearance of reading culture but the transformation of its orientation—from deep, sustained reading to rapid, surface-level consumption.

Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding how digital culture reshapes literacy behavior, particularly among rural adolescents who experience both traditional socio-cultural values and growing digital exposure. Practically, the findings can inform educational institutions, literacy practitioners, and policymakers in designing balanced literacy strategies that strengthen reflective reading skills without neglecting the benefits of digital tools. The study's limitations include its relatively narrow participant scope—restricted to one rural village—and its qualitative nature, which limits generalizability. Therefore, future research should involve broader and more varied samples, possibly using mixed-methods approaches to capture both behavioral patterns and measurable impacts on literacy skills.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered. Educational institutions should develop literacy programs that integrate both digital and printed materials to strengthen students' analytical and critical reading abilities. Teachers are encouraged to combine digital reading tasks with discussions of printed texts to cultivate deeper comprehension. Parents should create a balanced reading environment at home by regulating excessive gadget use and encouraging printed book reading. For teenagers, it is essential to practice mindful digital engagement and allocate time for traditional reading to enhance vocabulary mastery, concentration, and long-term literacy development. By addressing these aspects, efforts to mitigate the degradation of traditional English reading habits can become more effective and sustainable.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere appreciation and deepest gratitude to the editors and reviewers for their valuable suggestions, insightful feedback, and dedicated efforts in helping to improve this manuscript until it was deemed suitable for publication. Special thanks are also extended to the editorial team of *Onoma* for providing the opportunity to publish the results of this research.

This study was financially supported by Universitas Samudra through a Research Grant Scheme (Grant No. 27/UN54.6/PT.01.03/2025). The author would also like to thank colleagues, academic advisors, and students who contributed to this research through technical assistance, participation in data collection, and constructive suggestions throughout the research process.

If any part of this study has been previously presented in an academic forum, the author wishes to extend appreciation to the seminar participants and organizers for their valuable input, which greatly enriched the development of this article. The moral, intellectual, and professional support from various parties has been instrumental in enabling the completion and publication of this research.

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