

DIGITAL LITERACY AND READING HABITS OF THE PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Ms. Neetu Yadav
Research Scholar
Dept. of Library & Information Science,
Pondicherry University, Puducherry
yadavneetu.bhu@gmail.com

Mr. Sarin M.S
Research Scholar
Dept. of Library & Information Science,
Pondicherry University, Puducherry
Sarinsudarsanan1995@gmail.com

Dr. M. Leeladharan
Associate Professor
Dept. of Library & Information Science,
Pondicherry University, Puducherry
mleeladharan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Digital literacy is the key to survival in this internet era, starting from clerical work to top notch jobs in multi-national companies' application of ICT in their daily routines has become inevitable and mandated for every job. Especially during the Covid-19 lockdown the student community faced a lot of hardships in accessing and utilizing the resources for their academics, hence this study was carried out to understand the digital competencies among the students as well as their reading styles, choices and preferences. The major objective is to understand the reading habits as well as the digital competency of the student and research scholars of Pondicherry University. For the said purpose a structured questionnaire was designed and distributed among the student and research scholars of Pondicherry University. The responses were coded and recorded in Excel for tabulation and analysis. The respondents are good with their skills related to computing and internet and Social media reported as the major source of information on new technologies for them. They agreed that the better Digital literacy could pave way for a paperless society.

Introduction

The fast growth and spread of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into industries including education, business, health, agriculture, and so on has changed society. A multiplicity of digital information may confound information consumers and access and analyzing information has become increasingly challenging. In the digital age, it is essential to improve digital literacy. There has been an explosion of information since globalization first entered the field of education. And it is calculated that the number of Internet users in the population is more than 66.2 percent. Since 2000, Internet users have increased by 1,355 percent during the last two decades. In India, 47% of people had access to the internet as of the beginning of 2022. Also, In India, net customers increased by 34 million (+5.3 percent) between 2021 and 2022, according to a Kepios study (Data Reportal, 2022). As a result of this increase, cyber cafes and internet parlous have expanded across India, offering services that are both easily accessible and reasonably priced. Due to the Covid lockdown, all the work was being done online and students suffered a lot due to this unexpected but inevitable transformation in the mode of online education. The online learning model is still becoming more and more popular as more tertiary institutions strive to provide students with modern, flexible educational opportunities as well as interactive digital learning experiences found in successful and engaging virtual classes for undergraduate and postgraduate education (Mery & Newby, 2014). It is extremely difficult to give large groups of students an interactive learning experience while also keeping in mind that attempts to raise the caliber of pedagogy at tertiary institutions have acted as the primary impetus for revisiting focused teaching strategies in higher education (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). The need for new educational initiatives that would meet the needs of fostering capacities for effective use of and comprehension of digital technology as a cornerstone for lifelong learning was pressing, and the educational institutions were under pressure to offer them (Shopova, 2014). Stated that the level of competence needed to access electronic database resources is higher than the level needed to search printed sources and that students must develop specific abilities to take advantage of and use the expanding range of e-resources. To increase their comfort in using electronic databases at the library, they must have a strong understanding of digital literacy (Adeoye and Adeoye, 2017). Having a broad range of practises and cultural materials at your disposal for digital instruments is a sign of being digitally literate. It is the ability to

successfully create, cooperate, and communicate while being aware of how and when digital tools may support these pursuits the most (Ekenna and Iyabo, 2013). There has been a lot of scientific research in the area of digital literacy, but only a few papers have focused on digital literacy skills among university students. So, in this paper, we will focus on digital literacy skills and digital reading habits among university students.

Literature Review

“Digital literacy is a set of abilities and skills that are necessary for everyone to do information-related tasks, such as how to find, access, understand, analyze, manage, create, communicate, save, and share information” (CILIP, 2018). “Digital literacy is the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide variety of sources when it is presented via computers and, particularly, through the medium of the Internet” (Gilster, 1997). Acquiring necessary digital literacy abilities is a necessity for extending access to ICT to increase the job market competitiveness of young people (Shopova, 2014; Hicks, 2013). A student has to have a wide range of sophisticated cognitive, physical, social, and emotional abilities to perform well in digital environments. These skills are referred to as “digital literacy,” and they go beyond simply knowing how to utilize software or operate a digital device (Leahy & Wilson, 2014). Students in higher education, where self-directed learning is anticipated, must make sure that the data they use is reliable, accurate, and trustworthy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, and use the internet, social media, and other online resources to function effectively in the knowledge economy. The degree of technology intelligence a person possesses completely determines their level of digital literacy (Varghese & Musthafa, 2022). These digital skills are crucial to developing a learning strategy in the contemporary educational environment since they also fuel learners' learning preferences (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, Varghese & Musthafa, 2021) and has proved to have an positive influence on their academic performance (Yustika, 2020). To access, manage, and create knowledge, this skill entails the use of technology and communication networks. (CBSE, 2020). Therefore, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and innovation must be a major component of the curricula for higher education in the twenty-first century. This is accomplished in educational settings that emphasize collaboration and teamwork while also including communication, information, and media literacy abilities (Kay & Greenhill, 2011; Pushpanadham & Chirumamilla 2017). There have been several challenges in the modern period with relation to information identification, access, use, and assessment. When carrying out their responsibilities, researchers, students, and other readers must contend with several challenges to ensure the accurate and legitimate use of information and information resources (Safdar & Idrees, 2021). Moreover Digital Literacy is the only mean by which the individuals can identify and differentiate misinformation and disinformation (Subaveerapandiyan, 2021). To tackle these issues, it is thought that students need to have a strong understanding of information literacy (Schiffl, 2020). The qualitative investigation revealed that although students with Visual Impaired demonstrated fundamental digital literacy skills, they have difficulties producing digital material, evaluating essential information, and cooperating with others. (Arslantas, T.K., Gul, A.2022). Digital reading has a significant influence on college students' reading habits. However, due to its numerous drawbacks, such as shallow thinking, a lack of critical awareness, and a lack of inventiveness, it is best described as “shallow reading.” Previous research has demonstrated a substantial inverse relationship between people's cognitive function and the amount of time they spend reading on digital devices (Hao, 2019).

Objectives

1. To examine the digital literacy among the research scholars and student community.
2. To assess the level of digital literacy skills.
3. To know the digital reading habits.
4. To examine the level of digital applications of software by students.

Profile Of The University And Library

Pondicherry University is a public-funded central university in Puducherry, India, which was established in 1985. It has been ranked among the top institutions by NIRF and has earned the NAAC's "Grade A" designation. The university is well-known for its professional programs. This core institution is well known for its research-based curriculum. The university library is renowned for its excellent infrastructure and proactive services which includes but not limited to fully air-conditioned reading halls, disabled-friendly floors, Wi-Fi accessibility, and services for the Visually Challenged. With RFID technology and 24/7 remote access to a collection of 5.66 lakhs, the library has carved out a niche for itself at the national level.

Methodology

The study is limited to students of Pondicherry University's main campus only, the campuses at Karaikal and Andaman Islands are excluded, and all Undergraduate, Post Graduate, and Ph.D. Scholars were considered. The sample consists of 162 randomly selected respondents from Pondicherry University. Subaveerapandiyan (2021) study constructs were untiled and a questionnaire was developed and the same was issued through random

sampling method both in person and through online. The data were collected regarding various dimensions of Digital Literacy and Reading habits among respondents through options on the Likert 5-point scale.

Findings

The profiling of the respondents is presented for better understanding in Table 1.

Type	Division	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	98	60.5
	Male	64	39.5
Age Groups	16-20	4	2.5
	21-25	80	50.6
	26-30	62	38.3
	30 and above	14	8.6
Nature of Location	Rural	56	34.6
	Semi-Urban	57	35.2
	Urban	49	30.2
Stream of study	Humanities and Social Sciences	77	47.5
	Management and Commerce	19	11.7
	Life Science and Science	52	32.1
	Mathematics and IT	14	8.7
Educational Status	Integrated UG/PG	15	9.3
	Post Graduate	75	46.3
	Ph.D.	72	44.44
School experiences digital literacy	Yes	87	53.7
	No	75	46.3
College experience digital literacy	Yes	127	78.4
	No	35	21.6
Total		162	100

Table - 1: Demographic profile of Respondents

More females (60.5%) responded to this survey compared to males (39.5%). More than 50 percent of the respondents were in the age group 21-25 years. An almost equal number of responses were received from respondents from Rural, Urban and Semi-urban regions. A majority of 47.5 percent are from Humanities and Social Sciences, followed by 32.1 percent from Life Science and Science and the least (11.7% and 8.7%) are from Management and Commerce, and Mathematics and IT respectively. A maximum of 46.3 percent of respondents are Postgraduate students, closely followed by 44.4 percent of Research Scholars and 9.3 percent of respondents from Five-year Integrated programs; and also 53.7 percent of students got experience with digitization during school time, and 78.4 percent of respondents got experience with digitization during college time.

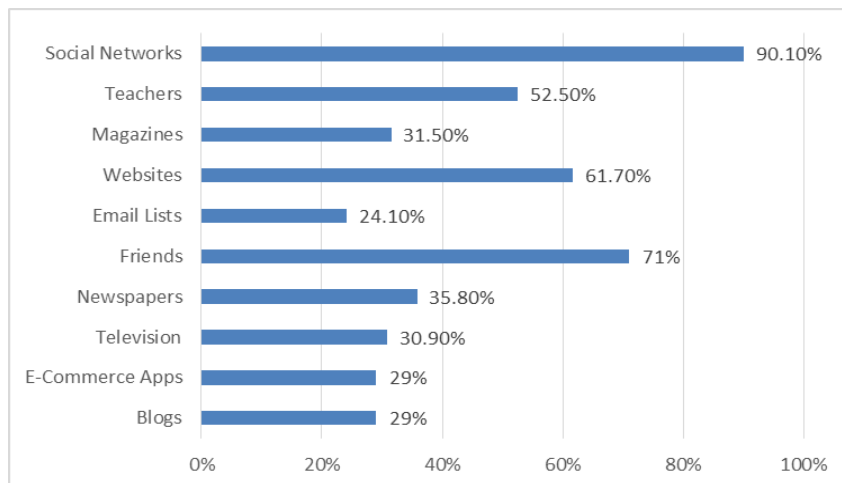


Figure - 1: Sources of information on New Technologies

The above figure reveals that 90.10 percent of respondents get to know about new technologies via social networks, followed by 71 percent from friends, and 61.70 percent from websites.

Digital Literacy Skills	Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Poor	Very Poor
Typing Skills	31(19.14%)	82(50.62%)	44(27.16%)	5(3.08%)	0
Web Search	49(30.25%)	78(48.15%)	35(21.6%)	0	0
Computer Literacy	41(25.30%)	79(48.77%)	36(22.23%)	5(3.08%)	1(.62%)
Internet Literacy	49(30.24%)	88(54.33%)	22(13.58%)	2(1.23%)	1(.62%)
Digital Literacy	36(22.23%)	83(51.24%)	35(21.6%)	6(3.70%)	2(1.23%)

Table - 2: Self-rating of Literacy Skills by respondents

Self-ratings of literacy skills were reported in Table 2. The majority of respondents (50.62 %) are competent at typing and 48.15 percent had good web search abilities, and 48.77 percent reported their computing abilities as good. A majority of 54.33 percent of respondents had strong internet literacy. The capacity to use digital technology is referred to as digital literacy. In terms of digital literacy abilities, 51.24 percent of respondents reported themselves as good at it.

Digital literacy skills	Yes	No
Do you understand the basic functions of computer hardware components?	148 (91.36%)	14 (8.64%)
Do you use keyboard shortcuts?	139 (86.42%)	22 (13.58%)
Do you use the computer for learning purposes?	148 (91.36%)	14 (8.64%)
Do you use social networking services?	152 (93.83%)	10 (6.17%)
Do you have mobile apps for language learning installed in your mobile?	108 (66.67%)	54 (33.33%)
Can you create and update web pages?	44 (27.16%)	117 (72.84%)

Table - 3: Digital Literacy Skills

The results in table 3 demonstrate digital literacy skills. The majority of (91.36%) respondents understand the fundamental functions of computer hardware components. Similarly, 86.42 percent know to use keyboard shortcuts. While 91.36 percent of respondents do use the computer for learning purposes 8.64 percent did not know how to make use of it for the said purpose. 93.83 percent used social networking services and 6.17 percent did not; while 66.67 percent used language learning apps remaining 33.33 percent never used it; 27.16 percent were aware of creating and updating web pages and 72.84 percent were not.

Digital applications	Very Frequently	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Email	57.41%	20.37%	14.82%	6.17%	1.23%
World Wide Web	61.11%	19.14%	10.49%	4.94%	4.32%
Database	14.82%	32.10%	29.01%	15.43%	8.64%
Spreadsheet (for Data Organization)	12.96%	19.75%	37.04%	21.61%	8.64%
Language Learning Mobile App	7.40%	14.20%	35.19%	34.57%	8.64%
Blog	8.64%	16.05%	25.93%	33.95%	15.43%
Text Chatting	46.30%	22.23%	14.81%	12.96%	3.70%
Voice Calling	48.15%	24.69%	15.43%	8.64%	3.09%
Video conferencing	29.63%	32.10%	22.84%	13.58%	1.85%
Electronic dictionary	28.40%	26.54%	27.16%	9.87%	8.03%

Table - 4: Frequency of using digital applications

The respondents' frequency of use of the digital environment was elicited in Table 4. Email was used by 57.41 percent of respondents very frequently, 61.11 percent used the internet very frequently, databases were occasionally used among 29.01 percent of respondents and spreadsheets were used occasionally by 37.04 percent of respondents. 35.19 percent of those surveyed reported occasionally using language learning mobile applications, 46.30 percent of respondents said they used text messaging very frequently, while 33.95 percent said they blogged rarely. Voice calling was very frequently favored by 48.15 percent of respondents. 32.10

percent of respondents said they utilized video conferencing frequently, and 28.40 percent of those surveyed said they very frequently used an electronic dictionary.

Digital Application Skills	Do not Know	Poor	Acceptable	Good	Very Good
Word Processing	6%	2.47%	29.01%	37.66%	25.30%
Spreadsheet	4.33%	15.43%	29.62%	37.03%	13.59%
Database	18.52%	21.60%	32.10%	20.37%	7.41%
Presentation	4.33%	6.17%	25.92%	36.42%	27.16%
Communication	6.79 %	11.12%	33.95%	27.77%	20.37%
Social Networking	3.70%	4.33%	24.69%	29.01%	38.27%
Search Engines	3.08%	2.47%	13.59%	25.30%	55.56%

Table - 5: Self Rating of expertise in using digital applications

Table 5 shows self-assessment of proficiency in using digital applications. The majority of 37.66 percent of respondents said to be good at word processing software. 37.03 percent are good at spreadsheet apps, and 32.10 percent said that their proficiency in using database applications is acceptable. 36.42 percent of respondents reported their knowledge as Good in presentation applications. 33.95 percent of responders reported their knowledge as Acceptable in communication apps; 38.27 percent of respondents reported that their knowledge and application of social networking services skills as very good. Similarly, 55.56 percent of respondents rated themselves as very good in the use of search engines.

Digital devices Usage	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Enjoy using digital devices	31.49%	59.87%	6.17%	0.62%	1.85%
Feel comfortable using digital devices	26.54%	61.12%	9.26%	1.23%	1.85%
Aware of various types of digital devices	26.54%	59.26%	9.88%	2.47%	1.85%
Understand what digital literacy is	23.46%	61.12%	12.34%	1.85%	1.23%
Willing to learn more about digital technologies.	43.21%	46.30%	8.64%	0.62%	1.23%
It is important for me to improve my digital fluency	46.30%	43.83%	8.02%	0.62%	1.23%
My learning can be enhanced by using digital tools and resources	46.92%	43.83%	6.79%	1.23%	1.23%
Training in technology-enhanced language learning should be included in language education programs.	44.45%	43.83%	9.87%	0.62%	1.23%

Table - 6: Digital Devices usage

Table 6 shows how users interact with and value their digital devices/gadgets. The overwhelming majority of respondents (59.87 %) agree that they enjoy and like using digital devices. 61.12 percent of respondents agree that they felt comfortable using digital devices. 59.26 percent agreed that they were aware of various digital devices. 61.12 percent agree to be knowledgeable about digital literacy and skills. 46.30 percent agree that they are willing to learn about digital technology. A majority of 46.30 percent respondents strongly agreed that having digital fluency is essential for improving oneself. 46.92 percent strongly agree for adopting digital tools and resources might enhance their digital learning. 44.45 percent of respondents said they strongly agreed that language education programs should include training in technologically enhanced languages.

Knowledge about Digital Tools	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I know how to use digital tools to find information.	19.13%	50%	18.52%	2.47%	9.88%
I know how to use digital tools to understand information.	19.13%	50%	16.67%	5.56%	8.64%
I know how to use digital tools to connect with others.	21.60%	50.62%	14.20%	7.41%	6.17%
I know how to use digital tools to work with others.	8.02%	3.71%	18.52%	50%	19.75%

I know how to use digital tools to create my work.	9.26%	6.17%	17.28%	46.92%	20.37%
I know how to use digital tools to share my work.	8.64 %	3.71%	17.90%	48.15%	21.60%
I understand what it means to be a responsible digital citizen.	7.41%	8.02%	22.23%	41.36%	20.98%

Table - 7: Knowledge about Digital Tools

Table 7 shows the knowledge regarding digital tools. Half the respondents agreed that they know how to utilize digital tools to discover new information, again 50 percent of respondents agree that they are familiar with using digital tools to interpret information. Knowing how to interact with others online is something that 50.62 percent of respondents agreed with, and 21.60 percent of respondents strongly agreed. Half of the respondents 50 percent disagreed that they can collaborate with others using digital technologies. 46.92 percent disagreed with this statement that they knew how to use digital technologies to do their work. 48.15 percent disagreed with the statement that they knew how to use digital technologies to share their work. 41.36 percent disagreed with the statement that they understand what it meant to be a responsible digital citizen, with 22.23 percent being in neutral mode.

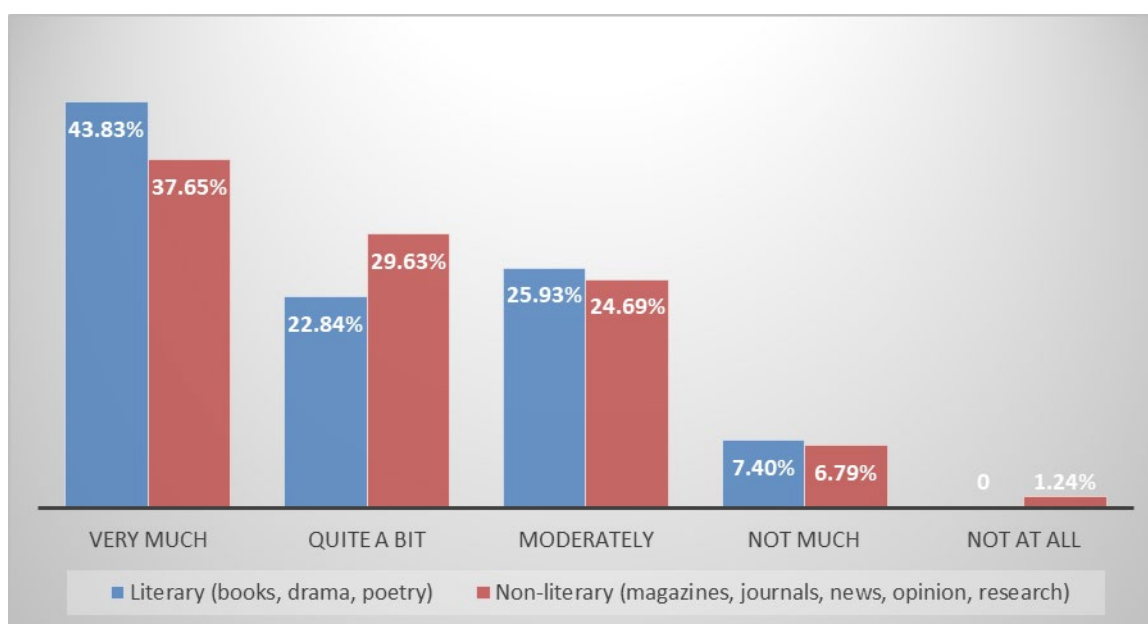


Figure - 2: Preference for Reading Literary and Non-literary works

Figure 2 shows preference of reading literary and non-literary books among respondents. 43.83 percent liked literary books very much, and 37.65 percent liked non-literary books very much. 25.93 percent moderately liked literary books and 24.69 percent moderately liked non-literary books.

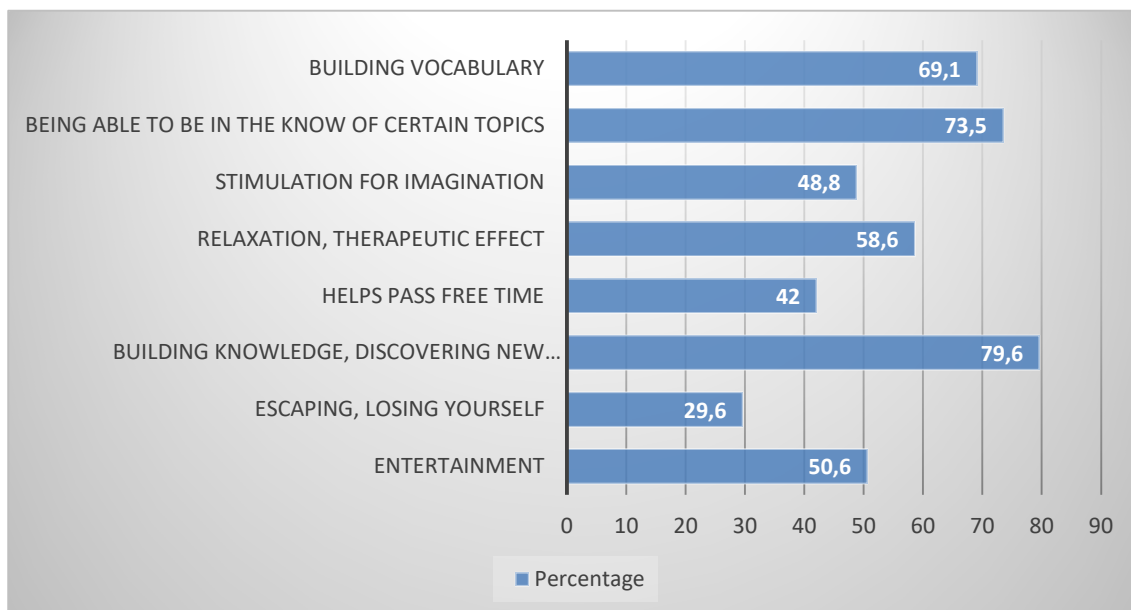


Figure - 3: Primary Reasons for Reading

Figure 3 shows the Primary Reasons for Reading. The overwhelming majority of 79.60 percent of respondents choose Building knowledge as the reason for reading, and discovering new information as the primary reason for their enjoyment of reading; 73.50 percent of respondents have chosen Being able to be in the know of certain topics.

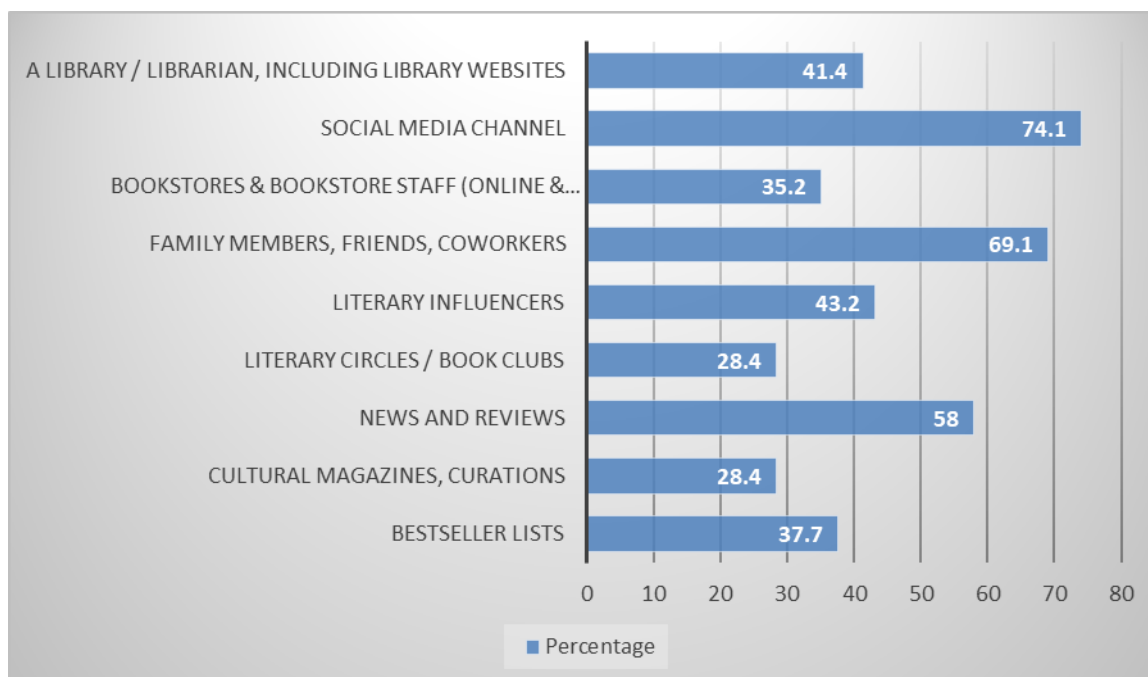


Figure - 4: Reading Recommendations

Figure 4 shows how recommendations for reading were given to them. The majority of 74.1 percent of respondents reported getting reading recommendations from social networking sites, while 69.1 percent reported getting them from friends, or family, 58 percent reported news and reviews, and 28.4 percent of respondents each reported literary circles/book clubs and cultural magazines, curations as sources for reading recommendations.

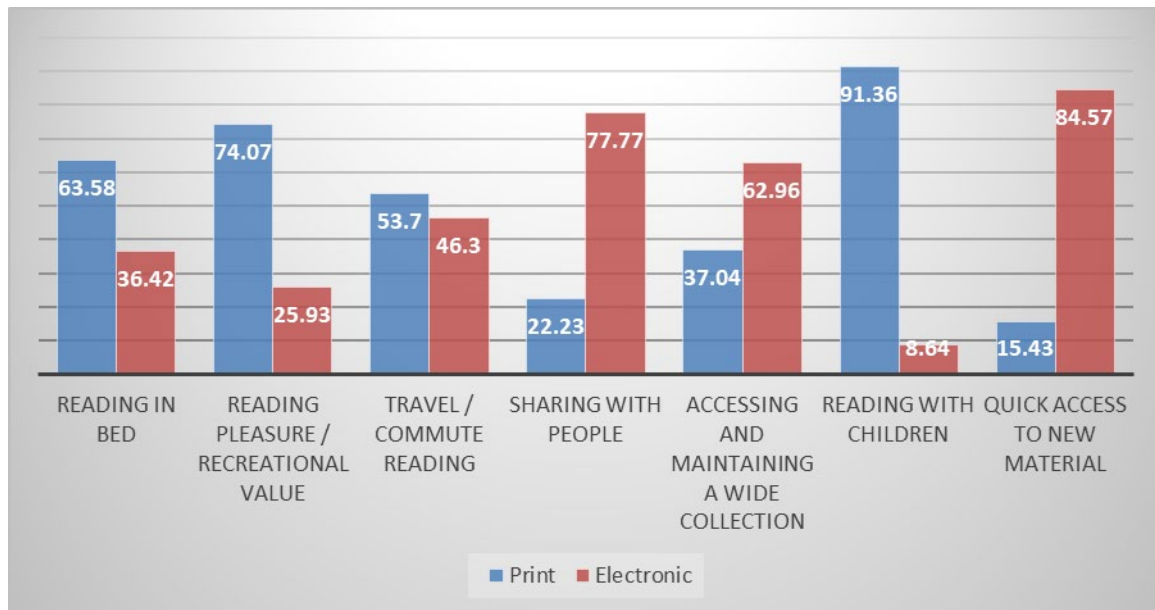


Figure - 5: Choices of Formats

Choices of formats of reading materials among respondents are shown in Figure 5. A majority (63.58%) of them preferred print format for reading in bed, and 74.07 percent preferred print formats for reading for pleasure and fun. 53.7 percent said they preferred print formats for reading during travel or commuting, and sharing with others in the preferred medium (electronic) recorded 77.77 percent of responses. Accessing and keeping up with a large library of books is possible in electronic format as reported by 62.96 percent of respondents, and 91.36 percent reported Print as a suitable format for reading with children. 72.6 percent of respondents said they prefer electronic formats for quick access to fresh information.

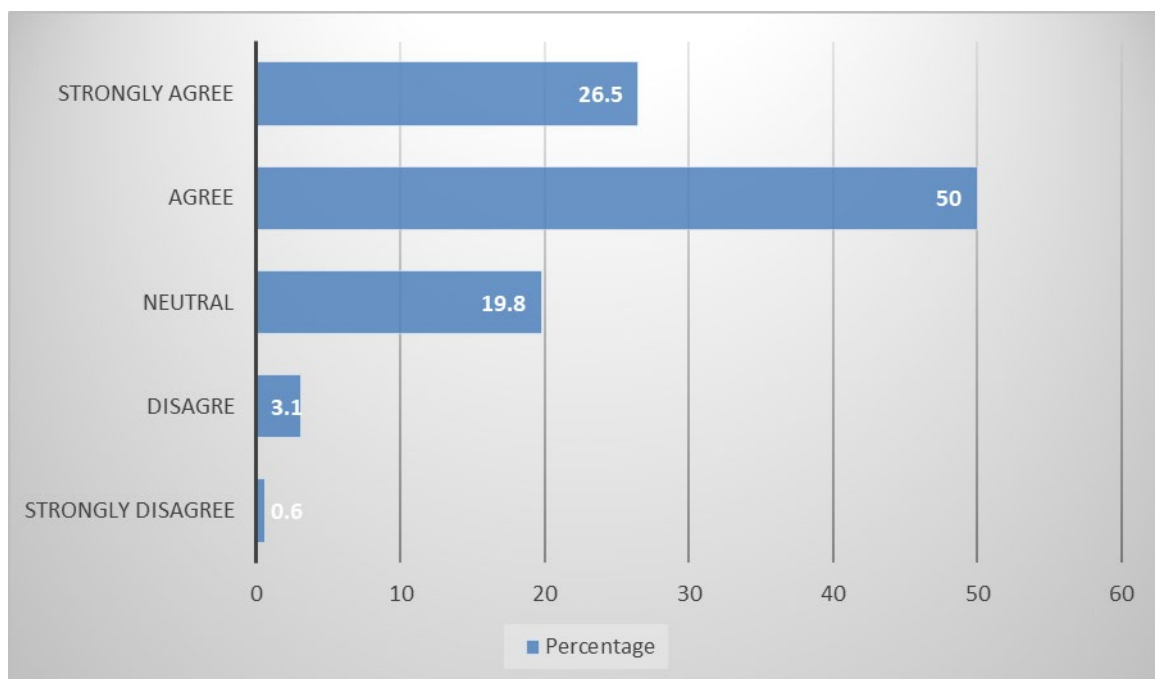


Figure - 6: Opinion on Digital Literacy leading to paperless society

As shown in figure 6, a paperless society may be achieved via the use of digital media and information literacy abilities. Half of the respondents (50%) agreed with this statement, and 26.5 percent of those surveyed strongly agree. The neutral response rate was 19.8 percent and 3.1 percent disagreed, and 0.6 percent only strongly disagreed with this statement.

Conclusion

The Social media seems to be a major media through which awareness on new technologies are propagated to the younger generations, and the present day generation feel themselves to be good at typing, making web searches, internet surfing and like works as they affluently make use of gadgets. Email and WWW are the most frequently used Internet services and the majority are willing to learn more about the digital technologies as they felt their learning can be enhanced by making use of digital technologies. While digital technologies are highly being used for connecting with others through social media and like. Preference for reading literary books was more among the respondents and they read books to build their knowledge and discover new information. Getting suggestions on books to read was more through social media and they had their preferences for Print and electronic versions of books was divided for different reasons and occasions. Majority agreed that having better digital literacy will be the solution for paperless society. Better digital literacy and healthy book reading habits are complimentary to each other and post pandemic the online learning and hybrid learning models has gained momentum. Being digital literate is the need of the hour for everyone in the society as we have moved longtime back in to the digital era.

References

- Adeoye, A. A., & Adeoye, B. J. (2017). Digital literacy skills of undergraduate students in Nigerian Universities. *Libr. Philos. Pract*, 1665.
- Arslantas, T. K., & Gul, A. (2022). Digital literacy skills of university students with visual impairment: A mixed-methods analysis. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-21.
- CBSE. (2020). 21st Century Skills: A Handbook. New Delhi.
- CILIP (2018). "What Is Information Literacy? - CILIP: The Library and Information Association." Retrieved September 4, 2022 (<https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/421972/What-is-information-literacy.htm>).
- Data Reportal (2022). "Digital 2022: India." Retrieved September 4, 2022 (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-india>).
- Ekenna, M., & Mabawonku, I. (2013). Information retrieval skills and use of library electronic resources by university undergraduates in Nigeria. In *Information and Knowledge Management* (Vol. 3, No. 9, pp. 6-14).
- Gilster, P., & Glistler, P. (1997). *Digital literacy* (p. 1). New York: Wiley Computer Pub.
- Hao, C (2019). Digital reading habits of college students and countermeasures of university libraries. *Frontiers in Educational Research*, 2(4).
- Hicks, T., & Turner, K. H. (2013). No longer a luxury: Digital literacy can't wait. *English journal*, 58-65.
- Hornsby, D. J., & Osman, R. (2014). Massification in higher education: Large classes and student learning. *Higher education*, 67(6), 711-719.
- Kay, K., & Greenhill, V. (2011). Twenty-first-century students need 21st-century skills. In *Bringing schools into the 21st century* (pp. 41-65). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Leahy, D., & Wilson, D. (2014, July). Digital skills for employment. In *IFIP Conference on Information Technology in Educational Management* (pp. 178-189). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
- Mery, Y., & Newby, J. (2014). *Online by design: the essentials of creating information literacy courses*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pushpanadham, K., & Chirumamilla, N. (2017). Scaffolding Learning in Higher Education: Some Digital Initiatives. *University News*, 55(51), 14-19.
- Safdar, M., & Idrees, H. (2021). Assessing undergraduate and postgraduate students' information literacy skills: scenario and requirements in Pakistan. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 1A-33.
- Schiffel, I. (2020). How information literate is junior and senior class biology students? *Research in Science Education*, 50(2), 773-789.
- Shopova, T. (2014). Digital literacy of students and its improvement at the university. *Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science*, 7(2), 26-32.
- Subaveerapandiyani, A. (2021). Digital Literacy and Reading Habits of the Central University of Tamil Nadu Students: A Survey Study. *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*.
- Trilling, B., & Fadel, C. (2009). *21st-century skills: Learning for life in our times*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Varghese, J., & Musthafa, M. M. A. (2021). Investigating 21st Century Skills Level among Youth: An Empirical Study. *GiLE Journal of Skills Development*, 1(2), 99-107.
- Varghese, J., & Musthafa, M. M. A. (2022). Integrating Digital Literacy Skills and Technological Intelligence in the Higher Education Curriculum of India: A New Paradigm. *Issues and Ideas in Education*, 10(1), 31-38.
- Yustika, G. P., & Iswati, S. (2020). Digital literacy in formal online education: A short review. *Dinamika Pendidikan*, 15(1), 66-76.