

READING BEHAVIOR IN ACADEMIA: DOES SMARTPHONE OVERUSE MATTER?

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Abstract

Reading is an essential skill that should be developed in any culture and an integral part of the educational infrastructure of any society. On the other hand, reading habits in Nigeria are hindered by several factors, such as mobile devices' rapidly advancing technological capabilities. The present study examined over-dependency on smartphones as a potential variable that could account for the variations in reading behavior among students. Two hundred and fifty-two undergraduates enrolled in three public higher education institutions in Ebonyi State participated in the survey. The respondents completed a self-report measure of the Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short Version (SAS-SV) and Reading Behavior Scale. The simple regression analysis performed on the data revealed that smartphone overuse statistically significantly correlated with the student's reading behavior $\beta = .66$. The findings suggest that the hypothesis that the prevalence of smartphone overuse would significantly predict reading behavior among students was correct and warranted more investigation. The practical implications and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: Smartphone overuse, Reading behavior, students, tertiary institutions

Introduction

Reading is essential for educational achievement and is a prerequisite for accessing most activities in everyday life (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2016; Bigozzi et al., 2017; Ganie et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2018; Kiili & Leu, 2019; Krashen et al., 2021; Kung & Aziz, 2020; Linder et al., 2018; Paige et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2020). Reading instruction is one of the key focuses of the educational system. Therefore, reading is considered a formative experience (Castles et al., 2018). It is plausible that reading and writing play a crucial role in many facets of schoolwork (Kojo et al., 2018). A love of reading is crucial to a student's academic and social development (Khairuddin, 2013). Therefore, reading explains how one can access information, develop abilities, and articulate ideas (Itsekor & Nwokeoma, 2017). Learning to read is an ongoing process that begins even before a child enters a classroom (Alexander, 2005). Even though most people link reading with the classroom, reading outside of school has a substantial impact on how students perform on Reading assessments (Locher & Pfof, 2020)

Fundamentally, reading behavior refers to the behavior that conveys the likeness of reading, individual preference of reading materials, and tastes in reading. It describes the habitual and regular reading of books and information materials. As defined by Nyam (2015), reading behavior is the practice of making regular time for reading. Thus, this endeavor aims to encourage reading and turn it into a widespread pastime (Otiike, 2011). Acquiring a reading behavior includes internalizing practices that promote reading and learning (Adimora et al., 2017). It is important to note that most individuals do not just read for school nowadays; they read for other purposes, like

pleasure, leisure, and self-improvement (Alex-Nmecha & Horsfall, 2019). Reading behavior refers to a collective set of knowledge and practices about reading, including objective and subjective norms. The capacity to read, a good evaluation, and the resources one has at their disposal are all necessary components. Indeed, there has been a steady fall in reading behavior in modern nations.

Good reading behavior is very much needed for one's healthy intellectual growth as it provides the reader with a sense of values that help him to develop the capability to understand. A survey of the relevant literature highlights the widespread nature of Nigeria's subpar reading behavior (Ajidahun, 2015; Danladi & Soko, 2019; Fabunmi & Folorunso, 2010; Ifedili, 2009; Ihedioha., 2021; Ihejirika et al., 2021; Oji & Erubami, 2020; Okuonghae & Obadare, 2021; Olasehinde et al., 2015; Ukpebor, 2020). Nigeria's alarmingly low reading behavior permeates all levels of the country's educational system. Authors agree that many young people do not value reading because they see it as a financially fruitless endeavor (Oribabor, 2014) and not associated with pleasure (Igweni et al., 2012). Reading is fundamental to learning and ultimately serves as a justification for attending school. While reading might be beneficial, most college students do not have the time to devote to it. Several factors have been implicated in the student's poor reading culture, for example, teaching method (Nwosu et al., 2021), limited access to reading materials (Ruterana, 2012), non-integration of the library in the school curriculum (Adejimoh et al., 2021), inadequate library services (Emmanuel & Augustine, 2021), environmental factors (Florence, 2012), and academic engagement and achievement orientation (Adimora et al., 2017). However, smartphone overuse is a scarcely explored variable that could negatively impact students' reading culture.

Traditional mobile phones, which could only be used for making phone calls and sending text messages, have been largely superseded in recent years by smartphones. Current smart devices provide wireless access to the internet and can perform many of the tasks that a computer typically uses. There is a rising concern regarding the impact smartphones will have on students' reading behaviors as they become increasingly accessible to the general public. This is not only because the additional features of smartphones distract reading more than simply making phone calls and sending texts but also because cell phones generate dependent use patterns. Because it can perform various tasks, the smartphone is an indispensable tool in today's modern higher education system (Lei et al., 2020). Therefore, it gives students the ability to acquire material that is relevant to their academic growth. In more recent times, the usage of smartphones for social purposes has become more prevalent than their use for academic accomplishment. Even though they have become an essential part of modern life, excessive use of smartphones can lead to significant mental and social issues, such as dependency (Choi et al., 2020). Dependence on a smartphone is characterized by the compulsive and excessive use of mobile devices. This behavior is typically quantified by the number of times users access their devices and the total time they spend online over a given period.

Excessive smartphone use has been associated with several social, mental, and other health-related outcomes. Indeed, researchers have found a connection between the overuse of smartphones and certain types of harmful mobile phone dependency. For example, nomophobia has been used to describe the dread of losing access to one's mobile. It has been argued that smartphone users who suffer from such negative dependencies reportedly become anxious if they experience a loss of network connectivity, phone separation, or a flat, although the trend is universal. However, it appears that such problems can potentiate a relapse in reading among students and exacerbate

negative reading culture. Although, smartphone dependence among students has attracted huge research attention in Nigeria (Akpunne & Akinnawo, 2019; Ayandele et al., 2020; Balogun & Olatunde, 2020; Onuoha & Bada, 2018; Iorver et al., 2018; Obi et al., 2020; Onuoha, 2019). Results indicate that many students commit most of their time surfing the internet using their mobile phones.

Intimations suggest that most students no longer participate as expected in their schoolwork in recent times. However, it is common to see many students commit to their smartphones during school periods. Most importantly, their continued internet use is primarily for social interactions and activities other than their educational pursuit (Enwereuzor et al., 2016). Due to smartphones' high accessibility and mobility, extensive and pervasive smartphone use has become the social norm, exposing users to numerous health and other risk factors (Yu & Sussman, 2020). The more students use a smartphone, the more they are exposed to many positive and negative impacts. Given the prevalence and undesirable consequences of smartphone overuse among students, it is necessary to explore the correlation between the trend and reading behaviors.

Hypothesis: *Smartphone overuse predicts reading behaviors*

Method

Participants

Students from Tertiary Institutions in the Ebonyi State of Nigeria constituted the research population. Students aged 18-30 years comprised of males and females enrolled in different courses at Ebonyi State University and Alex Ekwueme Federal University were conveniently recruited for the study. The respondents were mainly pooled from the student's lodges and classrooms. One hundred twenty-seven students were approached and asked to participate in a survey to understand their use of mobile devices. In all, 123 participants out of the 127 approached agreed to participate in the survey. Hence, the questionnaires were given to them. One hundred and twenty-three (123) copies of the questionnaires administered were completed and recovered on the spot. Nonetheless, only the satisfactorily filled questionnaires (i.e., 111) were used for the study. The remaining 12 copies were discarded for wrongful filling.

Measures

Smartphone addiction was assessed using the Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short Version (SAS-SV) developed by Kwon et al. (2013). The SAS-SV comprises ten items. Responses to each item were scored using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Sample items include: "Having my smartphone in my mind even when I am not using it" and "The people around me tell me that I use my smartphone too much." The score on the instrument ranged from 10 to 60. Higher scores signify more addiction to smartphones. The SAS-SV is internally consistent with Cronbach's α Coefficient of .73 obtained in the contemporary sample

Reading behavior was measured with a modified version of the reading behavior scale initially developed by (Türkel et al., 2017). The adapted 18 items Likert form scale measures reading habits, attitudes, and perception of reading in a 5-point response format. The reliability of the

instrument was ascertained using Cronbach alpha. Items had a mean internal consistency, which yielded 0.78. A higher score indicates a high reading culture.

Result

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS. Version 23) was used to analyze the data.

Table 1: shows the simple regression result.

	B	SEB	β	t	Sig
Constant	1.84	.031		73.56	.000
Smartphone overuse	.67	.071	.66	14.31	.000
R^2	.238				

Note. B = Unstandardized regression coefficient; SEB = Standardized error of the Coefficient; β = Standardized Coefficient; R^2 = Coefficient of determination. * $P < .000$.

A simple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that smartphone addiction would significantly predict student reading behavior. The investigation revealed that smartphone overuse statistically significantly correlated with the student's reading behavior $\beta = .66$. The findings suggest that the hypothesis that the prevalence of smartphone overuse would significantly predict the reading behavior among students was correct and warranted more investigation.

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between smartphone reliance and reading behavior among students. Data from a convenience sample of one hundred and eleven undergraduates were analyzed using simple regression analysis. The result demonstrated that smartphone addiction statistically correlated with reading behavior among the respondents. The result indicates that smartphone overuse accounted for about 23.8% of the variation in reading behavior among undergraduates. This indicates that the habitual use of mobile devices is making a substantial contribution to the general reading behavior of today's students within the context of the modern educational system. The multi-features of modern mobile devices, which enable users to engage in multitasking activities, such as instant messaging, gaming, selfie-taking, social interactions, business exploration, and other enjoyable activities, potentiate this outcome. This may be attributed to the fact that the multi-features of these modern mobile devices were introduced relatively recently. Many students have also overlooked reading in recent years because they believe it is just necessary for examinations and does not bring any immediate reward compared to the fun that can be had with smartphones.

The finding aligns with findings from earlier investigations (Anyira & Udem, 2020; Oji & Erubami, 2020). For example, Bukhori et al. (2019) discovered that students' smartphone addiction levels were connected to how much time they spent reading textbooks. Recent studies have shown that smartphone overuse is significantly linked to increased reading interruptions (Gezgin et al., 2021). Indeed, research has found a link between smartphone addiction and reading attitudes (Çizmeçi, 2017; Levratto et al., 2021). The result can be explained based on the conception that

compulsive phone use negatively impacts the motivation to engage in reading. The study's findings indicated that the respondents varied in reading habits, confirming the perpetual concern by educators over the poor reading behavior of many students despite the importance of reading. Despite the increasing popularity of smartphones in contemporary societies, their overuse among students has been broadly discouraged because of their negative impact on academic performance (Lin et al., 2021). Thus, the present finding proves that smartphone addiction significantly correlates with reading behavior in Nigeria's educational context.

Limitations, strengths, and future directions

It is necessary to disclose the limitations discovered in relation to the current investigation. The small sample size, which consisted solely of students enrolled in two universities in Ebonyi state, might hinder the study's generalizability. Because the data used for the study relied only on self-report, the possibility of common method variance was present throughout the process. The current research, on the other hand, contributes to the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating that smartphone overuse is an essential variable in the reading culture. This finding broadens our understanding of the factors contributing to students' poor reading behavior in the institution. Also, the study helps provide relevant data to education administrators, researchers, and school authorities in promoting Reading behavior in Nigeria. In addition, a dearth of research attempts to analyze the connection between dependency on smartphones and a culture of reading in Nigeria. In subsequent research, it is essential to consider collecting data from a wider variety of sources and to make every effort to apply data triangulation.

Conclusion

Reading behavior was investigated for this particular study in the context of an increasing addiction to using smart mobile devices among undergraduate students. Indeed, the linear regression analysis of the gathered data supported the study's hypothesis. Thus, the study concluded that smartphone overuse among students is crucial for determining their reading culture. However, whether other variables contributed to the study's outcome is unclear. More research is needed to determine other intervening variables in the relationship between smartphone addiction and reading behavior in the Nigerian context. Furthermore, since most students are addicted to their mobile phones, e-books, and e-assessments should be extensively employed to attract their attention to reading.

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