



## Printed Versus Electronic Books: Uses and Preference of Mass Media Students in Lahore



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**Abstract:** *This study is an exertion to determine the preference of university students regarding the usage of electronic books. Postulates of displacement theory were applied to find out the reasons behind students' adoption of online mode of reading and its effects on learning outcome. The study has examined that if the printed books will be totally replaced by the electronic version or not. A sample of 150 university students studying in the Mass Communication department was selected. Survey methodology was employed to find answers to the research questions. The findings of the study revealed that students preferred using electronic books to printed books. The e-books are considered cost-friendly, easy to access and portable. With the help of findings, it was concluded that e-books had become part and parcel of the life of students, but at the same time, there would be a preference for reading printed books.*

**Key Words:** Printed Books, E-books, Reading, Students, Preference

### Introduction

Technology has become a major component of our lives; it has affected every aspect of life, has completely changed the way people live and communicate. It has even altered the mode of formal and informal education. In 2011, Amazon reported that purchases of e-books had surpassed those of printed books. This is considered an important change in the way people consume information (Gibson & Gibb, 2011; Hamblen, 2011) in different parts of the world.

The use of smartphones and tablets has become very common among people of all ages,

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especially for students. Electronic gadgets have become essential for students to perform their class activities, reading the online version of textbooks, novels, and communicate with one another. The increase in the popularity and usage of electronic gadgets has put a question mark on the future of printed books and material. The introduction of e-books and their inclusion in the library collections in recent years has raised many questions on the existence of printed books. Usually, printed books and e-books have similar content but differ in many other ways. Both e-books and printed have their own advantages and disadvantages. It was predicted that digital libraries would be developed where the students would read and download their needed book free of cost (Bodomo et al., 2003). Many studies show that electronic books are considered more portable and user friendly, and also they are cheaper as compared to printed versions.

Keeping in view the popularity of e-books and the involvement of students in online activities, this study is intended to explore the preference of the students regarding book reading. Considering the developing state of Pakistan, it seems imperative to investigate that do the students living in Pakistani prefer online books on printed version and are they learning how to use technology more productively. Therefore, in light of the literature review, this study is focused on answering various questions like which medium do university students prefer to read books, printed or electronic? Why do university students prefer to use electronic books? This study has tried to find out the reading preference of mass media students of the University of Punjab. This study has also explored the reasons behind their preference for the electronic medium are.

A long time ago, Liu (2005) predicted that readers would develop the habit of reading through the screen (laptop or mobile), but with this, printed books are never going to fade from society. In the light of this prediction, this research also intends to find out the opinion of the university students about this notion that do they think that printed books would be replaced by electronic books completely in future? The theoretical foundation of this study is to knit around the idea of media displacement or replacement theory. It is very important to ask the question about the future of printed books because there is a lot of debate going on whether electronic books will replace printed books or not. The major idea of media displacement or replacement, which has been center of investigation among media researchers for decades, is based on the phenomena of equivalence. This equivalence can take many forms, such as similarity in appearance, method of use, and function. Since functional equivalence is based on the assumption that a new medium provides the same gratifications or benefits as the old one, it is imperative that studies using this framework specify the functions of the media very carefully (Robinson & Martin, 2009). This study has analyzed that up to what extent media students are using printed or electronic books. It has explored what factors make the media students choose either of the medium. The study would be significant for students and teachers to understand that if printed books are still useful or they have been replaced. It could help teachers to adopt the teaching patterns that are suitable to students.

## Literature Review

There are many studies in which it has been revealed that electronic books are the better source of information as compared to printed books, whereas there are various studies that suggest that there are still people who are not very comfortable with the use of e-books. [Martin and Haase \(2013\)](#) found out that there are certain people who are not very much comfortable with the concept of electronic books; they are confused and don't find e-book interesting. There is another study that deals with the ineffectiveness of e-books, [Abdullah and Gibb \(2008\)](#) established in their study that some respondents were unaware of the concept of the e-book.

While relating the adoption of electronic books to the diffusion of innovation theory, [Foasberg \(2011\)](#) established that there is a small number of students who use the electronic medium to study, and the majority of them are early adopters. Another study examines that many students feel uncomfortable while reading electronic books because of the tiredness, which comes from reading through the screen (Jeong, 2012). [Hom \(2016\)](#) figured out the same thing regarding the printed text. He argued that whenever a person is reading from the traditional text, he/she can actually remember that where a certain paragraph is located in a book. People have a certain kind of affiliation with the physical books, due to which they want to keep the books regardless of the price, and it is only possible when they have printed version ([Kraft, 2015](#)). Brown (2013) describes the same feeling in her blog. She explains that all of us love the feeling of having a new book holding in our hands. Students only prefer reading material of their choice, either on the print or electronic medium. The only thing that matter to them is their interest. Mostly students read novels as printed books and e-books as part of their course ([Rockinson et al., 2013](#)). Study disciplines also matter in choosing the electronic or print medium. Faculty of Arts and Sciences read books the most, but they least use electronic medium; however, students of engineering have the highest percentage of reading online ([Miller et al., 2013](#)).

[Tanner \(2014\)](#) referred to in his study that people found printed books easier and pleasant to read, and print reading helped them remember a lot of things. They can easily recall the page number and position of the word.

But contrary to this, [Gomez \(2008\)](#) writes in his book 'Print is dead' that the concept of print reading is getting outdated as we can see that a few people read newspapers and magazine in the print form. The concept of 'always online' has become very common, and people are usually busy downloading and sharing content with their friends and family; they feel comfortable downloading the electronic version and enjoy reading. On the other hand, [Sun et al. \(2012\)](#) argued that students who use e-textbooks during their study have a high degree of involvement and speedy learning as compared to those who study from printed books. The same idea is explained by [Chen et al. \(2010\)](#) that students who use web books have more power of learning in education, personal and social development, and it increases their thinking pattern. [Zucker et al. \(2009\)](#) also concluded that e-books have positive effects on students' comprehension because it helps to understand the meaning of unfamiliar words. While narrating the advantages of electronic books, [McMaken \(2012\)](#) found out that e-books have an advantage of storage.

But totally different perspective was presented by Taylor (2011). According to the study, either the medium is print, or it is electronic; in both cases, the learning outcome is the same. The important thing is to read the text. If one truly reads the text from either of the delivery methods, the results will be the same. Students can learn in equal proportions from both texts. While predicting the future of electronic books, [Jantz \(2010\)](#) stated that the trend of e-book evolution is new, and it is difficult to give a clue that how this alteration will be going to affect the library services. Maybe in the near future, there will be talking books and electronic inks in our libraries.

In the light of this literature review and media displacement theory, this study is intended to investigate the trends in Pakistan, that which medium of book students prefer here and what do they think about the future of printed books.

## Research Methodology

The survey research method is used in this research to fulfil the primary objectives of the study. According to Neuman (1997), the survey is a widely used method to gather data. The survey can be done through telephone, e-mails and in the form of questionnaires as the objective of this study was to investigate the trends among the university students, so the population of this study was university students, and the sample was drawn from the Mass Communication department of the University of Punjab. The students were selected from Masters, Bachelors and M. Phil programmes. The reason behind taking the sample was to see the percentage of technology adoption in the department where it has influenced most. A sample of 150 students was drawn from the department based on total enrollment. The questionnaire was used as an instrument for the collection of data. The structured questionnaire was developed to get the answers. The survey was done online, and the questionnaires were e-mailed to the respective students.

## Findings and Discussion

The results of the survey are shown in the tables.

### Purpose of READING e-Books

The first question in the question was asked about the purpose of reading e-books either students were using it for educational purposes, or they use to read novels or any other activity other than education. According to the results, 42.7% of respondents read e-books for educational purpose, while 15.3% of respondents read e-books for reading novels/fiction, and 42.0% of respondents read e-books for both purposes (table 1). These findings are also hopeful in the sense that students are taking full advantage of online resources.

**Table 1.** Purpose of Reading Books

Education	Infotainment	Infotainment
42.7 %	15.3 %	42.0 %

### Preference on the Basis of Availability

Another question was asked about the preference of electronic books on the basis of availability that do students prefer electronic books because they are easily available, and according to the findings, 9.3% strongly disagree, 8.7% disagree, 14.7 are neutral, 50.7 agree, and 16.7 strongly agree with the statement (table 2).

**Table 2.** Preference on the BASIS of Availability

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
9.3 %	8.7 %	14.7 %	50.7 %	16.7 %

### Preference on the Basis of Portability

It is to be said that e-books are easy to carry; they do not have any weight and can be carried easily. The results show that 5.3% of respondents strongly disagree, 8.7% of respondents disagree, 15.3% of respondents are neutral, 55.3% of respondents agree, and 15.3% strongly agree with the statement (table 3).

**Table 3.** Preference on the BASIS of Portability

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
5.3 %	8.7 %	15.3 %	55.3 %	15.3 %

### Preference on the BASIS of Cost

The cost also plays an important role in the preference of e-books because students have to survive in limited resources, and if they are getting any book free of cost, they will try to adopt that, and it is also shown in the findings of the survey. Therefore, 4.7% strongly disagree, 6.7% disagree, 14.0% are neutral, 52.0% agree and 22.7% strongly agree with the statement (table 4).

**Table 4.** Preference on the basis of cost

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
4.7 %	6.7 %	14.0 %	52.0 %	22.7 %

### Preference on the basis of Storage

The printed books require a lot of space for storage, it becomes an uphill task to store the books sometimes, so this could be one possible reason of preferring e-books, and the results show that 2.7% of respondents strongly disagree, 8.7% disagree, 12.0% are neutral, 58.0% agree and 18.7% strongly agree with the statement (table 5).

**Table 5.** Preference on the basis of Storage

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
2.7 %	8.7 %	12 %	58 %	18.7 %

### Preference to Memorize

It has been observed that sometimes students believe that it is easy to memorize the required information from e-book; the results show 8% of respondents strongly disagree, 24% disagree, 29.3% are neutral, 30% agree, and 8.7% strongly agree with the statement (table 6).

Table 6. Preference to memorize

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
8.0 %	24.0 %	29.3 %	30.0 %	8.7 %

### Preference to Increase Vocabulary

If it is convenient to memorize from e-books, it can also be said that it helps in increasing vocabulary. According to the results, 6% of respondents strongly disagree, 13.3% disagree, 20.7% are neutral, 44.7% agree, and 15.3% strongly agree with the statement (table 7).

Table 7. Preference to Increase Vocabulary

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
6.0 %	13.3 %	20.7 %	44.7 %	15.3 %

### Printed Books will be Replaced by E-books?

There was an important question about the replacement of printed books, and according to the results, 7.3% of respondents strongly disagree, 32.7% disagree, 24.7% are neutral, 23.3% agree, and 12% strongly agree with the statement that printed books will not be replaced by e-books (table 8).

Table 8. Printed Books will Be Replaced by E-books?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7.3 %	32.7 %	24.7 %	23.3 %	12.0 %

To fulfil the objective of the study that which medium is preferred by the university students to read books, whether electronic or printed books and why do they use electronic books, various questions were asked from the students. The findings show that 42.7% of students read electronic books for educational purposes, and 42% of students read electronic books to read novels. The results show that electronic books now have become a part of universities and students read more from online books for their class assignments. According to findings, the majority of the students (50.7%) agree that they prefer electronic books to printed books because they are easily available on the internet. The students prefer their ease when they choose to read any book. If they have to get a book, they will prefer to go for the electronic version than going and buying the print version. But only a small portion of students (8.7%) still prefers buying the printed version rather

than going for an electronic version of the same book. The majority of the respondents (55%) agreed that they prefer electronic books because they are easy to carry.

The findings show that a big part of students like the portability characteristic of electronic books. But there are some students who prefer a solid book over an electronic book. Due to the portability feature of electronic books, students can download as many e-books as they want on their electronic device. 58.0% of the students stated that they prefer electronic books to printed books because of the storage feature. They can store an unlimited number of electronic books on their device. In online storage, there is no issue with the bulkiness of any book. Maybe that is the reason that students prefer to store huge books in their smartphones or laptops rather than buying them in printed form.

The findings indicate that majority of the students (52.0% agree and 22.7% strongly agree) prefer electronic books because they can be downloaded free of cost. The students prefer the online option for expensive books, which are out of their range. Cost is also reduced when students do not buy the whole book; instead, they get the print outs of the required pages only. The results showed that the majority (44.7%) of the students choose an electronic book because they think that it increases their vocabulary. Online reading has a feature in which one can click on a word to know further about it, including its synonyms and antonyms. However, there are students (13.3%) who think that online reading does not help them with reference to vocabulary. They consider that a dictionary is more useful to enhance their vocabulary.

The research question about the future of printed books was formulated to know about the perspective of students regarding the future of printed and electronic books. Students exhibited a mixed response to this question. However, the major part of the sample (49%) stated that printed books would not be dead in the near future. So, university students still feel the need for printed books for their studies. This result gives a hope that the future of printed books is not gloomy; the students still believe in printed books just like electronic media has not been able to replace print media; in the same manner, the technology does not have the capacity to replace the traditional modes completely. There are students who rely on the printed version of books more than electronic books.

## Conclusion

Findings of the study reveal that electronic books are no more innovation for the students. The students feel comfortable while reading electronic books. According to the results, the percentage of Mass Media students who read electronic books is more than the percentage of students who read printed books. Although the printed books have been a part of their life from high school to university, with the changing trend, students prefer electronic books for their academic activities.

But findings also indicate that print books have their own value, and there are a good number of students who think that printed books will remain alive no matter how much electronic

technology invades and dominates the world. According to them, the concept of the printed books will never become dead, and it will continue to have its importance.

There are certain reasons due to which mass media students tend to prefer electronic books. Most of the time, electronic books are free of cost, could be easily downloaded and read. E-books are an affordable alternative to highly expensive academic books. There is no issue with storage with electronic books; Students can store hundreds and thousands of books in their smartphone or laptop. E-Books are portable and easy to carry as compared to the printed ones. Another finding of the study disclosed that the student feels comfortable with e-books for learning a concept as it enhances their vocabulary. This result is consistent with research, which stated that reading e-books activate the learning process of students. The students who use electronic books during lectures are likely to learn better than those who do not use such books. ([Sun et al., 2012](#)). Conclusively, this is the era of technological advancement and digital revolution, so electronic books are a better option for students at the university level.



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