

Factors Affecting the Reading Habits in the Digital Environment: A Study of Undergraduates of Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language at South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

Jazeel, M.I.M. and Dehigama, Kanchana

jazeelmi@seu.ac.lk, kdehigama@yahoo.com

The impact on the digital environment for reading habits has been widely addressed on global level. While there is no adequate number of studies in Sri Lanka, this research attempts to explore the factors that enable or inhibit the reading habits of undergraduate students of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka in the light of widespread availability of digital formats. This study employed a single case study approach. A survey was used as the method in collecting the data. The population of the study was randomly selected from the undergraduate students of Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Drawing 20% of the total number of students 218 were selected for the study. 203 completed questionnaires were received. The study revealed that integration of technology into the lives of students has widely affected their mode of reading. Availability of smart phones and laptops among 78% of the undergraduates tend them to spend more time online. Majority of the undergraduates indicated that they were not able cope with the screen-based reading. 65% of the students indicated that they are in favor of reading printed academic materials in print form. Students use new technological devices for light reading, while printed materials are used for serious in-depth reading. The study demonstrated that the wide availability of new technological devices prevents students spending more time in reading printed materials. Similarly, the study implicitly found that undergraduates do not read online journals/articles, due to the factors such as lengthiness, problems associated with the access, and they are of the opinion that those materials are too serious. Outcomes of the study implies that urgent measures should be taken by both teaching staff and librarians to promote health reading habits among undergraduates those who read less but spend more time online.

Keywords: *Reading habits, Information literacy, Southeastern University, Sri Lanka, digital environment*