



Lost in the Feed, Found in a Book: The Timeless Value of Reading in a World of Scrolling

Sashilemla Ao

Librarian, State College of Teacher Education, Kohima

Abstract: *The twenty-first century has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in human communication, knowledge acquisition, and leisure activities due to the rapid expansion of digital technology and social media platforms. While digital connectivity has democratized access to information, it has simultaneously fostered an environment characterized by continuous scrolling, fragmented attention, and superficial engagement with content. This phenomenon has raised significant concerns among educators, psychologists, librarians, and literary scholars regarding the declining habit of deep reading. The present article critically examines the enduring value of book reading in an era dominated by digital feeds. Drawing upon interdisciplinary literature from education, psychology, neuroscience, media studies, and literary criticism, the paper argues that reading books remains indispensable for cognitive development, emotional intelligence, creativity, empathy, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, the study discusses the challenges posed by digital distractions and proposes practical strategies to revive reading culture among younger generations. The article concludes that while digital technology is an invaluable educational resource, it cannot replace the unique intellectual and emotional experiences offered by sustained engagement with books.*

Keywords: *Reading Culture, Digital Media, Social Media, Deep Reading, Literacy, Cognitive Development, Critical Thinking, Digital Distraction.*

Introduction: The digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped how people interact with information. Smartphones, tablets, laptops, and wearable technologies have transformed the traditional reading environment into one characterized by instant notifications, algorithm-driven content, and endless streams of information. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok encourage users to consume information rapidly, often through short videos, memes, captions, and headlines rather than comprehensive texts.

The phenomenon commonly described as “scroll culture” has become a defining characteristic of modern life. Individuals spend several hours each day navigating digital feeds, frequently switching between applications, messages, and multimedia content. Although these technologies have expanded access to knowledge, they have simultaneously reduced opportunities for uninterrupted reading and sustained intellectual reflection.

Books represent a fundamentally different mode of learning. Unlike digital feeds designed to maximize engagement through novelty and speed, books encourage patience, concentration, imagination, and analytical thinking. Reading a book demands sustained cognitive effort, allowing readers to construct meaning gradually while engaging deeply with ideas, narratives, and arguments.

Reading Culture Through History: Reading has occupied a central place in the advancement of human civilization for millennia, serving as a primary means of preserving and transmitting knowledge, culture,

religion, and scientific inquiry. Ancient manuscripts safeguarded religious doctrines, philosophical discourses, historical records, and literary classics, enabling successive generations to inherit and expand the intellectual achievements of their predecessors (Manguel, 1996). Libraries, from the famed Library of Alexandria to contemporary public and academic libraries, have functioned as repositories of collective memory and cultural heritage, fostering scholarship and intellectual exchange (Casson, 2001).

A significant turning point in the history of reading occurred with the invention of the movable-type printing press by Johannes Gutenberg during the mid-fifteenth century. The printing revolution dramatically increased the availability of books, reduced production costs, and facilitated the widespread dissemination of knowledge (Eisenstein, 1979). As literacy rates improved, books became instrumental in shaping major historical movements, including the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment, all of which emphasized rational inquiry, education, and human progress (Briggs & Burke, 2010). Printed texts also played a crucial role in inspiring political reforms, social movements, and democratic ideals across different societies (Darnton, 2009).

Despite the rapid expansion of digital technologies, books continue to hold enduring value as comprehensive sources of knowledge. Unlike fragmented digital content, books provide detailed explanations, historical context, theoretical depth, and opportunities for sustained critical reflection. They remain indispensable for preserving complex ideas and promoting intellectual engagement that transcends the immediacy of digital media (Wolf, 2018).

The Rise of Scroll Culture: The proliferation of smartphones, high-speed internet, and social media platforms has profoundly transformed contemporary reading practices and patterns of information consumption. Rather than engaging with lengthy texts, many individuals increasingly rely on short-form digital content delivered through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as **scroll culture**, is characterized by continuous exposure to rapidly changing streams of information that prioritize speed, novelty, and visual appeal over depth and reflection (Carr, 2010).

Digital platforms are intentionally designed using persuasive technologies that maximize user engagement. Recommendation algorithms continuously personalize content according to users' preferences, encouraging prolonged interaction through endless scrolling, instant notifications, and variable reward systems (Alter, 2017). These mechanisms stimulate dopamine-related reward pathways in the brain, reinforcing habitual engagement and making disengagement increasingly difficult (Montag & Diefenbach, 2018).

Several characteristics distinguish scroll culture from traditional reading practices. These include instant gratification, constant novelty, shortened attention spans, rapid switching between diverse information sources, visual dominance through images and videos, and diminished opportunities for reflective thinking (Rosen et al., 2013). Unlike books, which require sustained attention and active cognitive engagement, digital feeds encourage rapid consumption of isolated pieces of information that are often forgotten shortly after viewing (Wolf, 2018).

Recent reports indicate that individuals spend several hours each day using social media and digital platforms, while time devoted to reading books has declined considerably, particularly among younger generations (OECD, 2021). Although digital technologies have greatly expanded access to information, scholars caution that the quality of engagement has shifted from deep comprehension toward superficial information processing (Carr, 2010).

Cognitive Differences Between Scrolling and Reading: Reading books and consuming digital feeds engage the human brain in fundamentally different ways. Deep reading—a process involving sustained engagement with extended texts—activates multiple cognitive functions, including focused attention, inference-making, vocabulary acquisition, memory consolidation, imagination, and analytical reasoning

(Wolf, 2007). During deep reading, readers actively construct meaning by connecting ideas, interpreting complex arguments, and integrating new information with prior knowledge, thereby strengthening higher-order cognitive abilities (Wolf & Barzillai, 2009).

In contrast, scrolling through digital content typically encourages fragmented attention and frequent task switching. The rapid presentation of brief texts, images, videos, and hyperlinks promotes multitasking, shallow information processing, impulsive decision-making, and reduced comprehension (Carr, 2010). Continuous interruptions from notifications and rapidly changing content further limit opportunities for sustained concentration and reflective thinking (Rosen et al., 2013).

Neuroscientific research suggests that prolonged exposure to fragmented digital information may gradually diminish the brain's capacity for sustained attention, making extended reading more cognitively demanding over time (Wolf, 2018). Since the brain exhibits considerable neuroplasticity, habitual patterns of media consumption influence the development of neural pathways associated with learning, memory, and reasoning. Deep reading strengthens networks responsible for critical thinking, empathy, imagination, and comprehension, whereas excessive reliance on fragmented digital media may reinforce habits of superficial processing and cognitive distraction (Wolf, 2007; Carr, 2010).

Consequently, although digital technologies provide unprecedented access to information, books continue to offer unique cognitive advantages by fostering concentration, intellectual reflection, creativity, and deep understanding that are difficult to achieve through continuous scrolling alone.

Reading and Critical Thinking: Critical thinking is widely recognized as one of the most essential competencies in contemporary education and democratic societies. It involves the ability to analyze evidence critically, evaluate competing arguments, identify logical fallacies and biases, synthesize information from multiple sources, and formulate reasoned, independent conclusions (Facione, 1990). These higher-order cognitive skills are cultivated through sustained intellectual engagement rather than passive exposure to information.

Reading books naturally promotes the development of critical thinking because readers must actively engage with complex narratives, abstract concepts, and multifaceted arguments over extended periods. Scholarly monographs, historical texts, philosophical treatises, and literary works require readers to interpret meanings, question assumptions, compare perspectives, and construct their own understanding of the text (Wolf, 2007). Unlike digital media, which often encourages rapid information consumption, books provide the cognitive space necessary for reflection, analysis, and deep comprehension (Carr, 2010).

Moreover, books expose readers to diverse viewpoints and nuanced arguments that foster intellectual curiosity and independent reasoning. Academic and literary texts frequently challenge readers to reconsider preconceived beliefs and engage in evidence-based evaluation rather than emotional reaction (Paul & Elder, 2019). This process strengthens analytical reasoning and supports the development of informed judgment.

In contrast, digital feeds frequently prioritize emotionally engaging content over intellectually rigorous material. Social media algorithms are primarily designed to maximize user engagement through personalized recommendations based on previous interactions rather than the credibility or accuracy of information (Pariser, 2011). Consequently, users may become increasingly exposed to misinformation, sensationalized narratives, confirmation bias, and ideological polarization, reducing opportunities for balanced critical reflection (Carr, 2010). As a result, habitual readers of books often demonstrate stronger analytical abilities, better argument evaluation, and greater resistance to misinformation than individuals whose primary source of information consists of fragmented social media content (Wolf, 2018).

Books and Emotional Intelligence: Beyond cognitive development, reading literature plays a significant role in fostering emotional intelligence and social understanding. Emotional intelligence encompasses the

ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and respond appropriately to one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others (Goleman, 1995). Literary reading offers unique opportunities to cultivate these capacities by immersing readers in the inner lives of fictional characters and exposing them to diverse emotional experiences.

Novels, biographies, dramas, and short stories enable readers to encounter individuals from different cultures, historical periods, and social backgrounds, thereby broadening their understanding of human behavior and interpersonal relationships (Nussbaum, 1997). Through prolonged engagement with characters' motivations, conflicts, and emotional struggles, readers develop empathy and perspective-taking abilities that extend beyond fictional narratives into real-world social interactions.

Literary scholars and cognitive psychologists have argued that fiction functions as a simulation of social experience, allowing readers to rehearse emotional responses and interpersonal understanding in a safe imaginative environment (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Regular engagement with literary texts helps readers recognize emotional complexity, appreciate moral ambiguity, develop compassion, and improve interpersonal communication skills (Kidd & Castano, 2013).

Unlike literary works, most social media content is brief, rapidly consumed, and frequently disconnected from broader narrative contexts. The fragmented nature of scrolling provides limited opportunities for readers to engage deeply with complex emotional experiences or sustained character development (Wolf, 2018). Consequently, although digital platforms facilitate social interaction, they seldom offer the profound emotional engagement and empathetic understanding that literature consistently provides.

Reading and Imagination: Imagination constitutes one of the defining characteristics of human intelligence, enabling individuals to visualize possibilities, solve complex problems, and generate creative ideas. Reading books serves as one of the most effective means of cultivating imaginative thinking because it requires readers to actively construct mental representations of characters, settings, events, and emotions using linguistic descriptions rather than pre-existing visual images (Wolf, 2007).

Unlike films, television, or social media videos, books do not provide ready-made visual interpretations. Instead, readers participate actively in creating unique mental landscapes, thereby exercising creativity and strengthening visualization skills (Manguel, 1996). This active cognitive involvement stimulates neural processes associated with imagination, creativity, and abstract reasoning.

Children who engage regularly in story reading often demonstrate higher levels of imaginative capacity, richer vocabulary, enhanced problem-solving abilities, and greater linguistic creativity than their peers who spend most of their leisure time consuming passive digital media (Krashen, 2004). Storybooks encourage children to invent possibilities, anticipate outcomes, and think beyond immediate realities, all of which contribute to cognitive flexibility and innovation.

In contrast, digital media frequently presents complete audiovisual representations that require comparatively little imaginative effort from viewers. Although multimedia content offers entertainment and convenience, it may reduce opportunities for individuals to generate original mental imagery independently (Wolf, 2018). Consequently, sustained book reading remains one of the most powerful activities for nurturing creativity and imaginative thinking throughout life.

Academic Benefits of Reading Books: Extensive research has consistently demonstrated that regular book reading contributes significantly to academic achievement across all levels of education. Students who voluntarily engage in sustained reading generally possess larger vocabularies, stronger writing abilities, improved grammatical competence, better reading comprehension, and greater overall academic performance than students who read infrequently (Krashen, 2004).

Reading exposes learners to sophisticated sentence structures, diverse writing styles, and discipline-specific terminology that cannot easily be acquired through brief digital interactions or classroom instruction alone. Frequent exposure to high-quality texts enhances language proficiency while simultaneously strengthening critical analysis, inference-making, and conceptual understanding (OECD, 2021).

Furthermore, reading across multiple disciplines—including literature, history, science, philosophy, and social sciences—broadens intellectual horizons and encourages interdisciplinary thinking. Such reading habits enable learners to establish connections among diverse fields of knowledge, thereby promoting creativity, innovation, and lifelong learning (Alexander, 2012).

Educational researchers have consistently reported positive correlations between voluntary reading and academic success. Students who read regularly tend to demonstrate higher standardized test scores, improved problem-solving skills, greater intellectual curiosity, and stronger motivation for independent learning (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Thus, cultivating a sustained reading habit remains one of the most effective strategies for enhancing educational achievement and lifelong intellectual development.

Reading in the Digital Age: The increasing dominance of digital technologies has transformed the ways in which individuals access, share, and consume information. However, the central issue is not the existence of digital technology itself but rather the manner in which it is used. Digital innovations have significantly expanded global access to books through e-books, online libraries, open educational resources, academic databases, and digital learning platforms, thereby democratizing educational opportunities for millions of readers worldwide (OECD, 2021).

Many contemporary readers successfully integrate both print and digital formats into their reading practices. E-books, audiobooks, and digital libraries offer convenience, portability, and accessibility, particularly for individuals with geographical, financial, or physical limitations (Baron, 2021). These technologies have broadened participation in reading rather than replacing books altogether.

Nevertheless, educational scholars distinguish between information consumption and deep knowledge acquisition. While digital media facilitate rapid access to large volumes of information, meaningful learning requires sustained attention, critical reflection, synthesis of ideas, and long-term memory formation (Wolf, 2018). Reading a carefully structured book differs fundamentally from browsing isolated online articles or scrolling through social media feeds because books encourage coherent understanding, contextual learning, and intellectual engagement (Carr, 2010).

Rather than viewing print and digital media as competing formats, scholars increasingly advocate for a balanced approach that combines the accessibility of digital technologies with the cognitive and educational benefits of deep reading. Such an approach enables learners to benefit from technological innovation while preserving the intellectual richness associated with sustained engagement with books (Baron, 2021).

Psychological Consequences of Constant Scrolling: The rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms has significantly transformed patterns of information consumption, but it has also introduced several psychological challenges associated with excessive scrolling. Emerging research suggests that prolonged engagement with social media feeds is associated with digital fatigue, diminished concentration, heightened anxiety, sleep disturbances, fear of missing out (FOMO), and information overload (Alter, 2017; Rosen et al., 2013). The endless stream of rapidly changing content demands continuous attention, often resulting in cognitive exhaustion and reduced mental well-being.

One of the most significant cognitive consequences of excessive scrolling is the disruption of sustained attention. Frequent notifications, alerts, and constant task-switching interrupt working memory and increase cognitive switching costs, making it more difficult for individuals to maintain focus on complex tasks (Carr, 2010). As users repeatedly alternate between applications, messages, and digital content, their capacity for

deep concentration gradually weakens, contributing to reduced productivity and impaired comprehension (Rosen et al., 2013).

Excessive social media use has also been linked to increased levels of anxiety and emotional distress. The phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) arises when individuals experience anxiety over potentially missing rewarding experiences shared by others online (Przybylski et al., 2013). Continuous comparison with idealized representations of others' lives can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and decreased psychological well-being (Twenge, 2017). Furthermore, prolonged screen exposure, particularly before bedtime, interferes with melatonin production and disrupts sleep quality, which subsequently affects memory consolidation, emotional regulation, and cognitive performance (Cain & Gradisar, 2010).

Books provide a valuable alternative to these psychologically demanding digital environments. Reading books encourages immersion, sustained attention, and cognitive relaxation by minimizing external distractions and promoting focused engagement with extended narratives or arguments (Wolf, 2018). Many psychologists recommend replacing bedtime smartphone use with book reading because reading facilitates relaxation, reduces mental stimulation, and contributes to healthier sleep patterns (Baron, 2021). Thus, cultivating regular reading habits may serve as an effective strategy for mitigating several of the psychological consequences associated with excessive digital scrolling.

Reading as a Form of Mindfulness: Reading books represents not only an intellectual activity but also a form of mindfulness that encourages deliberate attention, mental presence, and reflective engagement. In contrast to the rapid pace of digital media, reading requires individuals to slow down, concentrate on a single narrative or argument, and engage deeply with ideas without constant interruptions (Wolf, 2018). This focused mode of engagement aligns closely with the principles of mindfulness, which emphasize sustained awareness of the present moment and intentional attention to one's immediate experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Unlike social media platforms that continuously compete for users' attention through notifications and algorithmically generated content, books foster uninterrupted cognitive immersion. Readers often report becoming completely absorbed in a text, experiencing a state commonly described as being "lost in a book." This psychological condition closely resembles the concept of flow, a state of optimal experience characterized by effortless concentration, intrinsic motivation, and diminished awareness of external distractions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). During such periods, readers become deeply engaged with characters, ideas, and narratives, allowing for enhanced comprehension and emotional involvement.

Research has shown that sustained reading contributes to emotional well-being by reducing stress, lowering anxiety levels, and promoting psychological resilience (Billington et al., 2010). The immersive nature of reading enables individuals to temporarily disengage from everyday pressures while simultaneously encouraging reflection, empathy, and personal growth. Consequently, reading serves not only as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as a valuable practice for cultivating mindfulness, emotional balance, and overall mental health.

Libraries: Guardians of Reading Culture: Throughout history, libraries have served as indispensable institutions for preserving knowledge, promoting literacy, and nurturing intellectual development. Despite rapid technological advances, libraries continue to play a central role in sustaining reading culture by providing equitable access to books, scholarly resources, and educational opportunities for diverse communities (IFLA, 2022). They remain fundamental institutions supporting lifelong learning, democratic participation, and cultural preservation.

Modern libraries have evolved far beyond their traditional role as repositories of printed books. Contemporary libraries increasingly function as dynamic community learning centers offering digital

collections, electronic databases, reading clubs, author interactions, literacy campaigns, children's storytelling programs, makerspaces, research assistance, and digital literacy training (Aabø & Audunson, 2012). These services create inclusive learning environments that accommodate both traditional readers and digitally connected learners.

Rather than becoming obsolete in the digital era, libraries have successfully integrated traditional reading practices with emerging technologies. Many libraries now provide access to e-books, audiobooks, virtual reference services, online learning platforms, and collaborative research tools, thereby extending their educational mission beyond physical spaces (IFLA, 2022). By balancing print and digital resources, libraries continue to foster deep reading while adapting to the evolving informational needs of contemporary society.

Reading Among Young People: Encouraging reading habits among children and adolescents has become one of the most significant educational challenges of the digital age. As digital-native generations grow up surrounded by smartphones, social media, and streaming platforms, competition for their attention has intensified considerably (OECD, 2021). Consequently, educators, parents, and policymakers are increasingly concerned about declining engagement with books and its potential implications for literacy, academic achievement, and cognitive development.

Research suggests that fostering lifelong reading habits requires supportive environments both at home and in educational institutions (Krashen, 2004). Effective strategies include establishing family reading routines, strengthening school library programs, allocating dedicated classroom reading periods, organizing book discussion groups, conducting literary festivals, introducing reading challenges, integrating literature into digital platforms, and improving access to audiobooks and accessible reading materials (OECD, 2021). These initiatives help create positive reading experiences while making literature relevant to contemporary learners.

Teachers and parents serve as influential role models in shaping children's attitudes toward reading. Children who regularly observe adults reading for pleasure are significantly more likely to develop positive reading habits themselves (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Family encouragement, teacher enthusiasm, and access to engaging books collectively contribute to higher reading motivation and improved literacy outcomes. Therefore, nurturing reading among young people requires collaborative efforts involving families, schools, libraries, and broader communities.

Can Technology Promote Reading?

Although digital technologies are often perceived as contributing to declining reading habits, they also possess significant potential to promote reading when used appropriately. Rather than viewing technology as an adversary of books, many educators advocate for integrating digital innovations into broader literacy initiatives (Baron, 2021). Advances in educational technology have substantially expanded access to literature through e-books, audiobooks, virtual libraries, reading applications, online book clubs, digital annotation tools, and author podcasts.

Artificial Intelligence has further enhanced personalized reading experiences by recommending books based on readers' interests, reading histories, and preferred genres. Such recommendation systems assist readers in discovering new authors and expanding their literary preferences while increasing engagement with reading platforms (Baron, 2021). Similarly, digital libraries and open-access repositories have significantly reduced geographical and economic barriers to accessing educational materials.

Social media has also contributed positively to reading culture through online literary communities such as BookTok and Bookstagram, where readers share reviews, recommendations, reading challenges, and discussions of literary works. These communities have been credited with reviving interest in reading among adolescents and young adults by transforming books into shared cultural experiences (Murray, 2022).

Consequently, technology should not be viewed solely as a competitor to traditional reading but as a complementary tool capable of expanding literary engagement when integrated thoughtfully into educational and cultural practices.

Building a Sustainable Reading Culture: Developing a sustainable reading culture requires coordinated efforts from governments, educational institutions, libraries, publishers, families, and civil society organizations. Reading should be recognized not merely as an academic skill but as a lifelong practice that contributes to intellectual growth, democratic participation, emotional well-being, and social development (UNESCO, 2021).

Governments play a crucial role by investing in public libraries, expanding literacy programs, supporting community reading initiatives, and ensuring equitable access to affordable books across urban and rural communities. Educational institutions should allocate dedicated reading periods within school curricula, strengthen library infrastructure, and encourage extensive reading beyond examination requirements (OECD, 2021). Universities can further promote interdisciplinary reading by encouraging students to explore literature, philosophy, history, and the social sciences alongside their specialized disciplines.

Publishers also contribute by producing affordable editions, multilingual publications, and accessible digital formats that reach wider audiences. Simultaneously, families should cultivate reading-friendly home environments by modeling reading behaviors, discussing books, and limiting excessive screen time among children (Clark & Rumbold, 2006). Public campaigns celebrating books through reading festivals, literary competitions, book fairs, and community reading programs can reinforce reading as an enjoyable cultural practice rather than merely an educational obligation.

Ultimately, sustaining reading culture in the digital era requires balancing technological innovation with the enduring intellectual value of books. By promoting collaborative efforts across multiple sectors, societies can ensure that future generations continue to experience the profound cognitive, emotional, and cultural benefits that reading offers.

Conclusion: The digital age has transformed the ways individuals access and consume information, but it has not diminished the enduring significance of books. While social media and digital platforms provide convenience and immediacy, they often promote fragmented attention and superficial engagement. Books continue to offer a unique intellectual experience characterized by sustained concentration, critical reflection, emotional depth, and imaginative exploration. In a world increasingly shaped by scrolling, reading remains an act of resistance against distraction and superficiality. It nurtures informed citizenship, lifelong learning, and personal growth. The future of literacy therefore lies not in rejecting technology but in ensuring that the timeless practice of reading books continues to flourish alongside digital innovation. Ultimately, those who are “lost in the feed” can still be “found in a book,” discovering within its pages the depth, wisdom, and humanity that no endless scroll can fully provide.

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