

## Internet Use for Reading Practices Among Youth people in Mostaganem (Algeria)

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### Abstract

This research examines the Internet-based reading practices of young people in Mostaganem, Algeria, through an anthropological-descriptive approach and explores the socio-cultural factors influencing these behaviors. The study highlights that the Internet serves as the primary platform for academic and personal reading, driven by accessibility, practicality, and societal dynamics. Fieldwork conducted through questionnaires and interviews reveals that students primarily use the Internet for academic research, yet also explore personal topics such as beauty, relationships, and sexual education—subjects often considered taboo in their traditional society. The findings emphasize the decline of traditional book culture due to historical, institutional, and socio-cultural influences, alongside the transformative impact of digital technologies. This shift underscores the growing preference for digital reading over physical books, shaped by ease of access, evolving societal norms, and the limited promotion of reading culture within families and institutions.

**Keywords.** Reading, Internet, Young people, Mostaganem, anthropology.

### Introduction

The definition of the concept of reading is difficult to establish and may vary from person to person, particularly depending on family, social, school, and cultural environments. According to Bernard Lahire, reading is both an economic, social, and cultural practice subject to political issues, and it reveals the values, norms, and customs of our contemporary society. Thus, reading is a social practice that can be either a daily activity or non-existent, depending on the case.

Over the years, technological progress has had positive effects on the world of reading: access to books thanks to the invention of the printing press by Gutenberg, the creation of increasingly compact and portable formats, up to the pocket-sized book, and more recently, the evolution of the relationship with media and access to the Internet (which has become one of the most important information, communication, and entertainment devices) are examples of this.

In this field, young people are the most receptive to this new medium. Authors of recent studies on young generations use the term "Internet generation" rather than "Generation Y." In this way, the place of the Internet is growing in the social lives of young people. They do not hesitate to exploit the exchange opportunities offered. They even use it as a real working tool, organizing group activities and projects on different websites. According to our survey conducted among young people from Mostaganem connected to the Internet (2009), it appears that 100,000 of them are subscribed to the "Mobilis" network, 5,500 are connected to "Fawri," 2,500 to "Easy," and 500 to "Anis." We are witnessing a new "at-home" culture that allows easy and convenient access through the online distribution of various heritage collections, such as virtual libraries, museums, etc. Thus, it is undeniable that "the Internet" has become one of the fundamental companions of young people's journeys, while also being a serious competitor to encyclopedias and traditional libraries. As a result, the Internet has completely altered reading methods among young people. This upheaval in reading habits and practices, depending on the social background of those involved and the representations of this technology, manifests itself in various forms.

These considerations lead us to formulate the following research question: What is the nature of the reading practices of Mostaganem's youth on the Internet, and how do these practices (or the representations derived from them) influence their forms of sociability and daily life in a given cultural context?

Furthermore, have these new reading practices been modified with the advent of the Internet? Has media and cultural consumption led to changes in social behaviors? What do we know about young people's

relationship with reading on the Internet? How is it perceived within society? What are its mental and social representations? Broadly speaking, what types of reading interest the young people of Mostaganem?

To provide some insights into these questions, our study aims to assess the impact of reading on the Internet in the daily life of young students in Mostaganem and explain how they conceive this practice in a virtual space. We define young students as individuals aged 15 to 25 who are pursuing their studies in high school or university.

The choice to practice reading on the Internet seems to be influenced by cultural representation. More specifically, the practice is a socio-cultural product defined by the relationship between traditional culture and culture shaped by technological products. This interaction creates an image for young people through which they make their choices on the Internet and orient themselves toward a specific trajectory.

To address these questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- The youth of Mostaganem consult the Internet out of necessity for their academic research.
- The youth of Mostaganem refer to the web for cultural enrichment.
- Among Mostaganem's youth, reading on the Internet is perceived as a tool for knowledge.

## **1. Methodology**

The objective of our research focuses on two main axes, namely:

- On one hand, an anthropological-descriptive approach to the reading practices of young people on the Internet in Mostaganem, based on the statements of the individuals concerned.
- On the other hand, determining the conditions for exploiting the cultural representations of young people, allowing us to understand and explain the reality of the declared reading behaviors and practices on the Internet.

### **1.1 Study Site**

It is important to put our field of study into context. Mostaganem is located in the northern part of Algeria, 365 km west of Algiers, the country's capital. It enjoys a strategic geographical position and regional influence due to the presence of its significant commercial port and its network of transport routes connecting it to several cities. Thus, the Mostaganem region possesses economic assets that offer promising development opportunities in agricultural, maritime, industrial, and especially tourism sectors (museums, a lighthouse, old mosques, historic neighborhoods like Derb and Tobana, caves, archaeological excavation sites, forests, and particularly enchanting beaches). In terms of cultural infrastructure, the region is equipped with a cultural center (1,800 seats), an art school (200 seats), an open-air theater, two libraries including a newly inaugurated university library, and 36 cultural centers distributed across the wilaya's municipalities.

### **1.2 Field Research**

This is a multi-faceted approach based on field surveys. Two types of surveys are prioritized: a questionnaire survey and a qualitative interview survey.

#### **• A Qualitative Questionnaire Survey**

The survey was initially conducted with students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University in Kharouba, Mostaganem. This questionnaire aimed to identify reading practices in the academic field and everyday life among university students aged between 19 and 25, originating from different parts of the Mostaganem region and other wilayas.

#### **• A Qualitative Interview Survey**

The cybercafé is a place for socialization and learning that facilitates access to the Internet and promotes its development in society. This explains why our survey took place in a cybercafé located in downtown Mostaganem, in a highly frequented area near the central university and a high school. Young people's activities and electronic usage are quite standard: email, browsing, account creation, word processing, photocopying, etc.

The interview guide questions are based on our research concerns and objectives. Through these interviews, we aim to reveal the cultural representations of reading among students based on their Internet practices.

## **2. Results**

### **2.1 Questionnaire**

The surveyed population consists of 60 students from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University in Kharouba. Of this group, 25% are male, and 75% are female. The age range is between 19 and 25 years for the 2011-2012 academic year. Among these 60 students, 83.5% are single, 13% are married, and 3.5% are divorced. More than half of the students (58.5%) come from rural

areas, and 25% are from urban areas. Most of the students come from the surroundings of Mostaganem or other wilayas (16.5%).

Furthermore, 90% of the respondents report not working and thus rely financially on their parents. Regarding the educational level of their parents, we found that 50% of fathers have a secondary education level compared to 45% of mothers. About 28.5% of fathers hold a bachelor's degree, while a small minority of mothers (13.5%) attended university. Notably, 41.5% of mothers never attended school, compared to 21.5% of fathers.

The financial situation of these families is relatively moderate. About 75% of fathers work in the private sector, while 25% are employed in the education sector. The majority of mothers are homemakers (80%).

As for reading practices among university students, we observed that most young people, or 78.5%, began learning to read at the age of six, 13% at seven, and a minority (8.5%) at eight. The majority of young respondents declared having received their reading education at school (86.5%), while 8% were taught by their mothers. A small minority (25%) state they benefited from storytelling sessions during childhood (60% of these stories were religious, and 40% were fairy tales).

More than 91% confirm their reading practices on the Internet. About 70% report using the Internet out of necessity for their academic work, 20% for religious purposes, and 10% for general cultural enrichment. About 80% prefer reading online. Among them, 56.25% declare that the title of an article attracts them to read online, while 27% prioritize the subject and 16.75% are drawn to advertisements.

Within the surveyed population, there is a notable absence of reading notes based on articles read online. About 37.5% even explain that they rarely finish reading an article, while paradoxically, 62.5% report extracting the essential points for their academic work.

Since most students come from rural areas of Mostaganem, three-quarters of these young people access the Internet at cybercafés. About 46% engage in reading activities two to four times a week. Finally, 54% admit that they read very rarely.

Thanks to the multitasking system offered by computers, none of the young respondents in this study use the Internet without simultaneously listening to music (57%) or being connected to MSN or Facebook (43%).

Lastly, 41% of students borrow books from the library, while 44% prefer downloading them directly from the Internet. Only students with paid employment purchase books to meet their needs (15%).

## **2.2 Interviews**

When asked about their preferred uses of the Internet, young high school students (aged 15-19) primarily mention "chat" sites, the use of the social network Facebook, online gaming, browsing adult websites, and, secondly, searching for information for school assignments.

As for university students (aged 19-25), it was observed that they make the Internet their preferred platform for research through search engines like Google and Yahoo, downloading documents or research papers that can aid them in preparing their final year projects. They also use MSN messenger to share links to book or journal download sites and to communicate electronically with friends or colleagues.

Through interviews with young Internet users, we observed that aside from downloads for academic work, some young people use the Internet for personal interests. For instance, girls may search the Internet for beauty tips or relationship advice. Other young people admit to searching for and reading materials related to sexual education or sexual topics.

## **3. Discussion**

Most of the students from Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University in Kharouba, enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, report coming from families with a relatively average level of education that does not particularly promote a reading culture.

These results lead us to conclude that the majority of young people at this university have chosen to engage in reading on the Internet primarily for academic purposes, such as preparing coursework, presentations, or even downloading past exam questions. It is worth noting that reading practices on the Internet become easier thanks to the simplicity of downloading with just a few "clicks."

Additionally, we observe that these students do not create reading notes for the articles or books they consult, as the ease of saving files on computers or other storage devices (CDs, USBs, etc.) allows them to modify these materials at any time.

The tendency to consult books or journals on the topic of sexuality on the Internet appears to align with the societal customs of Mostaganem, a region known for its traditional values, particularly its sexual taboos and

restrictions. The lack of dialogue on these matters pushes young people to seek out resources that can provide them with sexual education.

## Conclusion

Our study aims to identify, analyze, and understand the Internet-based reading practices of young students from Mostaganem. These practices are inherently influenced by the socio-cultural representations within the context in which they live.

Based on an anthropological approach, our research employs a dual perspective: descriptive and analytical. It allows us to understand specific data related to a defined population, facilitating the interpretation of a reality shaped by its socio-cultural context.

Our research identifies key factors that favor Internet reading among the studied population, including historical, institutional, and societal influences.

- **Historical Factors:** Since national independence in 1962, many books were placed on library shelves without competition due to the state monopoly on the book industry. This led to a diminished status of books in Algerian society, where they became merely a necessary tool for acquiring knowledge and broadening one's worldview. This lack of a vibrant reading culture deprived young people of a fundamental aspect of reading practice: the pleasure of reading. The rise of e-books has further reinforced this trend.
- **Institutional Factors:** The use of library book search software, combined with the lack of direct access to physical books, encourages young people to seek information online, where results can be obtained in seconds.
- **Socio-Cultural Factors:** These play a significant role in shaping individuals. Young people construct their perceptions based on the values and norms transmitted by society. Young people in Mostaganem adopt the rules and customs imposed by their environment, which inevitably influences their lifestyles, particularly in their use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Several specialists argue that the total absence of sexual education in Algerian society (which is not included in the national education system) drives young people to seek answers elsewhere. Sexual topics are widely accessible across all media, especially the Internet. This medium provides young people with a way to explore and experience their sexuality freely but virtually.

Given the sexual prohibitions in Mostaganem's conservative society and the lack of family communication on these "taboo" subjects, we observed that young people turn to virtual books and journals addressing sexual topics.

The introduction of ICT, electronic communication, and, more broadly, the advent of the Internet has profoundly transformed the reading practices of young people, leading to a significant decline in the use of traditional books among Mostaganem's youth.

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## Questionnaire

### Identification Questions

1. Gender:  Male  Female
2. Age:  18-21  21-25

3. Marital Status:  Single  Married  Divorced
4. Do you have children?  Yes  No  
If yes, how many children? \_\_\_\_\_
5. City of origin: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you work?  Yes  No. If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_
7. You live in:  Urban environment  Rural environment
8. Father's educational level:  Primary  Secondary  Bachelor's  Master's  Doctorate  No formal education
9. Mother's educational level:  Primary  Secondary  Bachelor's  Master's  Doctorate  No formal education
10. Father's profession: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Mother's profession: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions on Reading Practices**

12. At what age did you start learning to read?  6 years  7 years  8 years Other: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Who taught you how to read?  Teacher at school  Mother  Father Other: \_\_\_\_\_
14. Were you read stories as a child?  Yes  No  
If yes, what types of stories?  
 Fairy tales  Religious books  Books about animals Other: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Do you read on the Internet?  Yes  No  
If yes, for what reason?  
 Schoolwork  Conversation topics  Religion  Other: \_\_\_\_\_
16. Do you prefer reading online or in books?  Online  Books
17. When you see an article online, what attracts you most?  
 The subject  The title  The advertising around it Other: \_\_\_\_\_
18. When reading an article or a book online, you:  
 Finish it  Skip through pages  Take notes  Extract only the essential
19. Where do you prefer reading online?  At a cybercafé  At home
20. When reading online, you:  
 Only read  Listen to music  Open other tabs  Connect on MSN, Facebook, etc.
21. For articles or books you need, you:  
 Download them  Borrow them from the library  Buy them Other: \_\_\_\_\_
22. Approximately how often do you dedicate time to reading online?  
 Every day  Several times a week  Once or more per month  Very rarely Other: \_\_\_\_\_