



Factors Influencing University Students' Preference for e-books over Printed Books in Chitwan

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Abstract

The rise of digital technology has shifted how university students access academic materials, with e-books becoming more widely used for their portability and accessibility. Limited research has studied the factors influencing readers' preferences for academic books, particularly in local contexts such as Chitwan. The main purpose of this study was to examine how cost, convenience, and ability to focus influence undergrads' preferences for e-books versus print books. A total of 335 undergraduate students were included in the study. A quantitative descriptive research design was used and data were analyzed through reliability testing and multiple linear regression analysis using SPSS. The results revealed ability to focus ($\beta = 0.459$, $p < .001$) and convenience ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < .001$) as significant predictors of students' preference for e-books. Although cost ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$) shows a significant positive relationship, its impact is comparatively weaker than the other factors. These findings indicate that students prioritize their ability to focus and convenience over price while studying. The study helps students, educators, libraries, policymakers, and other stakeholders in selecting appropriate learning resources. future researchers can expand on this work.

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1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed how students access and engage with academic materials. Over time, reading habits have shifted as students increasingly rely on digital devices for learning, making electronic reading an integral part of the modern educational landscape (Peras et al., 2023). As a result, university students today commonly use both e-books and printed academic books, reflecting a substantial change in the way academic content is accessed and consumed (Saiju et al., 2025)

A commonly cited definition of an e-book was provided by Armstrong, Edwards, and Lonsdale (2002), who described it as any electronic text, regardless of size or composition, excluding journal publications, and made available electronically for devices with a screen. Similarly, Davidson and Carliner (2014) defined e-books as publications that exist in digital format and are read using electronic devices such as e-book readers, tablets, computers, or mobile phones, while printed books refer to text read in physical paper form. In the context of the present study, e-books refer to electronic versions of printed books that can be accessed through computers or handheld digital devices designed for reading purposes.

E-books have gained increasing popularity due to their convenience, portability, affordability, and environmental benefits (Pandya et al., 2024). They allow students quick and flexible access to a wide range of academic materials, offer search and navigation features, and support multitasking across subjects. However, printed books continue to be valued for their tactile experience, ease of annotation, and their ability to support sustained attention and deep reading, particularly during intensive study sessions (Budnyk et al., 2021; Xhambazi et al., 2022). Although digital-based reading has become unavoidable in contemporary education, it may not always be equally effective for fostering deep comprehension and focused learning,

highlighting the importance of understanding both formats and their respective limitations (Peras et al., 2023)

The coexistence of digital and printed reading formats has become increasingly evident in academic environments worldwide. Despite the growing availability of e-books and digital learning tools, printed books have not been fully replaced and continue to play an important role in students' learning experiences. This indicates that students do not simply shift from one format to another but make deliberate choices based on their academic needs, study habits, and situational requirements.

In recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, the adoption of digital learning tools accelerated rapidly. Online and hybrid education models demonstrated that digital resources, including e-books, could effectively support academic instruction in higher education (Saiju et al., 2025). Consequently, students have become more accustomed to switching between digital and printed formats. For example, portability and ease of access often make e-books preferable for reading outside traditional study spaces, such as while traveling or studying in informal settings (Mcmaken, 2025).

Despite the growing adoption of e-books in higher education, there is limited understanding of the key factors influencing university students' preference for e-books over printed books in the local context of Chitwan, Nepal. This study therefore investigated: To what extent do cost, convenience, and ability to focus predict undergraduate students' preference for e-books in Chitwan? To answer this question, three independent variables cost, convenience, and ability to focus was taken and studied their influence on undergraduate students' preference for e-books versus printed academic books in Chitwan. The term convenience may be interpreted differently by each participant. For one student, it may mean not needing to visit the library to obtain a printed book. For another,



it may refer to accessing a book unavailable in print. Others may consider convenience as the ability to search for keywords within the text (Walton, 2014). In this study, convenience is defined more narrowly by focusing on keywords such as “portability”, “accessibility”, “ease of use”, “content searching”, and “reliability of e-books”, particularly when students are away from college or home. The ability to focus refers to the capacity to direct and sustain attention on a specific task while minimizing distractions, which is crucial for productivity and effective learning (Renz, 2025). While previous studies have used frameworks like the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain e-book adoption, critics such as University of Michigan & Bagozzi (2007) caution against overreliance on TAM, noting a “fallacy of simplicity” in understanding complex user behavior.

Based on data collected from 335 undergraduate students, this study aims to provide context-specific insights into academic reading preferences in Chitwan. While the findings rely on self-reported behavior and may not represent all students in the region, they contribute valuable evidence for improving academic resource planning and supporting effective learning practices in higher education.

2. Literature Review

Understanding students’ adoption of e-books has been widely examined through established theoretical frameworks. The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as key determinants of technology adoption, while the Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) focuses on compatibility, complexity, and relative advantage (Lai & Rushikesh Ulhas, 2012).

Recent empirical studies indicate that convenience, accessibility, and academic utility are major drivers of e-book adoption. Saiju et al. (2025) conducted a study on 210 university students of Kathmandu to examine perceptions of e-books versus printed books and their effect on academic performance. The participants were

primarily undergraduates (96.7%) with a balanced gender distribution (54.5% female, 45.5% male) and a mean age of 20.86 years. While students rated e-book features positively, paired samples analysis revealed a significant preference for printed books ($M = 3.84$ vs. 3.39 , $t(208) = -7.400$, $p < 0.001$). A weak positive correlation ($r = 0.172$, $p = 0.013$) suggested that students who preferred one format might slightly favor the other as well. This study’s focus on both formats, primary data collection, and clear statistical analysis mirrors the strengths of your friend’s work contextualizing behavior, analyzing barriers/preferences, and providing practical insight for hybrid resource adoption. Caperida (2024) found students preferred digital resources due to their accessibility, comprehensiveness, and impact on academic performance. Pandya et al. (2024) reported that younger readers (18–25 years) favored e-books for portability, although the tactile and emotional experience of printed books remained valued. Amirtharaj et al. (2023) observed that while 74.6% of students preferred e-books for portability, printed books were favored for studying (66.7%) and note-taking (67.9%), demonstrating the complementary role of both formats. Peras et al. (2023) systematically reviewed 23 studies on digital and paper reading among children and adolescents (6–18 years), examining gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and school location. The review highlighted that no single reading mode was superior, and reading outcomes were shaped by individual, family, and school factors. Digital reading raised concerns such as screen fatigue, whereas paper reading supported focus and comprehension. The study also noted gaps in research on resource access, school location, and health effects, emphasizing the need for nuanced, ongoing investigation.

Budnyk et al. (2021) similarly found that while e-books were preferred for practical use, over 70% of students relied on printed textbooks for deep concentration and critical comprehension. Singer & Alexander



(2017) emphasized task-specific adoption, noting that electronic reading was preferred for newspapers and magazines, whereas printed material supported academic focus. Cumaoglu et al. (2013) investigated 222 university students across 36 universities in Turkey, examining reading habits, e-book usage, and technological proficiency. The study found that 62% of students used e-books, primarily for research (81%), while 68% read at least one book per week. Students preferred e-books for accessibility (68%), with PDFs as the most common format (73%) and computers as the primary medium (60%). The social environment significantly influenced reading habits, highlighting how contextual factors shape both digital and printed reading preferences.

Older studies provide insights into library provision and field-specific adoption. Armstrong et al. (2002) reported that UK higher education libraries offered web-based e-books, but adoption was limited by perceived low demand, licensing issues, and bibliographic challenges. Librarians recognized e-books' value for collection management, highlighting collaboration with faculty and learning technologists.

Despite extensive international research on reading formats, there is limited empirical evidence explaining why university students in Chitwan, Nepal prefer e-books over printed academic books. Global or urban-centered studies may not fully reflect local academic environments, access to digital resources, or students' study behaviors. Understanding these preferences is therefore important for educators, libraries, and publishers to make informed decisions regarding academic resource provision

3. Methods

This study adopted a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach to examine the factors influencing students' preference for e-books, focusing on cost, convenience, and ability to focus.

The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students aged 18 years and above in Chitwan district

who regularly use academic books. A convenience sampling technique was used to select respondents based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. Accordingly, 335 students were included in the sample. Although the recommended sample size for a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error is approximately 384, the sample size of 335 is considered adequate as it yields a margin of error of about 5–6%, which is acceptable in social science and educational research (Saunders et al., 2023).

Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire consisting of 24 items related to cost, convenience, and ability to focus when using e-books. The questionnaire was administered physically to the respondents from August 31 to September 4.

The collected data were first entered into Microsoft Excel and subsequently processed and analyzed using SPSS software.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Items	Item deleted
Cost	0.774	3	2
Convenience	0.75	5	0
Focus	0.7	5	0

The reliability of the research instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicated acceptable internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.774 for Cost, 0.75 for Convenience, and 0.70 for Focus. According to Hair et al. (2019), a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable for basic research. Content validity of the instrument was ensured through supervisor review of the questionnaire items.

For data analysis, SPSS was used to calculate descriptive statistics and perform multiple linear regression, allowing the assessment of the combined effect of cost, convenience, and focus on e-book preference.

4. Results

Both descriptive and inferential analyses were



conducted to identify factors influencing students' preference for e-books over printed books in academic contexts.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 General Information of Respondents

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Demographics and Preferences

Demographics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-22	279	83.3
	23-26	50	14.9
	27-30	6	1.8
	31+	0	0
Gender	Female	215	64.2
	Male	120	35.8
	Other	0	0
Level of Study	Bachelor	335	100
Electronic Device Availability	Yes	311	92.8
	No	24	7.2
Internet Availability	Yes	306	91.3
	No	29	8.7

The demographic and technological characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 2. The majority of students (83.3%) were aged 18–22, followed by 14.9% in the 23–26 age group and 1.8% in the 27–30 age group. No respondents were above 31 years. This indicates that the study predominantly reflects the preferences of young university students, who are generally more familiar with digital technologies and likely to engage with e-books.

Regarding gender, 64.2% of the respondents were female and 35.8% were male. No respondents identified as other. The higher female participation may reflect either the actual gender distribution in the university or a greater willingness of female students to take part in surveys.

All respondents were pursuing a Bachelor's degree, showing that the study focuses entirely on undergraduate students. In terms of technological readiness, 92.8% of students had access to electronic devices, and 91.3% had internet availability, indicating that most respondents have the necessary tools and connectivity to engage with digital reading materials.

Overall, the findings suggest that the respondents are young, technologically equipped, and academically active undergraduates. Their widespread access to devices and the internet provides a favorable environment for e-book usage. These characteristics likely influence their preference for digital over printed books, as young students with good technological access are more inclined to adopt digital reading habits.

4.1.2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Factors

The mean and standard deviation were calculated for the three independent variables: cost, convenience, and focus.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD
Cost	3.64	0.86
Convenience	3.91	0.77
Focus	3.20	0.77

The mean and standard deviation of the three independent variables: cost, convenience, and focus are presented in Table 3.

Students rated convenience the highest ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.77$), indicating that factors such as accessibility, portability, and ease of use strongly influence their preference for e-books over printed books. Cost received a moderate rating ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.86$), suggesting that affordability is an important, but not the most decisive, factor in students' choice of e-books. Focus scored the lowest ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.77$), which implies that students may still perceive printed books as more effective for maintaining concentration during study sessions.

The results indicate that while digital reading is favored for its convenience, issues related to focus and cost continue to influence students' decisions. This suggests that e-books are primarily adopted for their practical advantages, but printed books still hold value in supporting deep concentration and study effectiveness.

4.2 Inferential Analysis

4.2.1 Model Summary

Table 4: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE
0.656	0.431	0.425	0.6588

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of cost, convenience, and focus on students' preference for e-books. The results are summarized in Table 4.

The model produced an $R = 0.656$ and $R^2 = 0.431$, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.425. This indicates that the three independent variables collectively explain 43.1% of the variance in students' preference for e-books, reflecting a moderate level of explanatory power.

These results suggest that convenience, cost, and focus are significant contributors to students' e-book preference, although other unexamined factors may also play a role. The moderate R^2 value indicates that while these variables are important, students' choices are influenced by additional factors beyond cost, convenience, and focus. In particular, the earlier descriptive analysis showed that convenience was rated highest, suggesting that accessibility and portability are the strongest motivators, which aligns with the regression results. Cost and focus, while less influential individually, still contribute meaningfully to the overall preference for e-books.

4.2.2 ANOVA Results

Table 5: ANOVA for Regression Model

Model	SS	df	MS	F	P-value
Regression	108.670	3	36.223	83.455	<0.001
Residual	143.669	331	0.434		
Total	252.338	334			

The ANOVA results for the regression model are presented in Table 5. The model produced a statistically significant result ($F = 83.455$, $p < .001$), indicating that the independent variables cost, convenience, and focus collectively have a significant effect on students' preference for e-books.

This significance confirms that the variation explained by the model is not due to chance and that these three factors meaningfully contribute to predicting students'

e-book preferences. The finding reinforces the earlier regression results, supporting the conclusion that convenience, cost, and focus are important determinants in students' choice of digital over printed academic materials.

4.2.3 Regression Coefficients

Table 6: Regression Coefficients of Linear Regression

Predictor	Beta	SE	Standardized Beta	P-value
Constant	0.193	0.213	-	0.366
Cost	0.131	0.049	0.130	0.007
Convenience	0.250	0.054	0.222	<0.001
Focus	0.519	0.053	0.459	<0.001

The results indicate that all three predictors significantly influence e-book preference. Focus emerged as the strongest predictor ($B = 0.519$, $\beta = 0.459$, $t = 9.735$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students' ability to maintain attention while reading greatly impacts their choice of e-books. Convenience also had a significant positive effect ($B = 0.250$, $\beta = 0.222$, $t = 4.650$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the importance of easy access, portability, and usability in shaping preferences. Cost showed a smaller but still significant positive influence ($B = 0.131$, $\beta = 0.130$, $t = 2.697$, $p = 0.007$), indicating that students consider affordability when choosing e-books. Overall, these findings suggest that while cost and convenience are important, the ability to focus while reading is the most decisive factor in students' adoption of e-books.

5. Discussion

The results of this study show that cost, convenience, and ability to focus all play significant roles in shaping university students' preference for e-books over printed academic books. Among these factors, ability to focus emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by convenience and cost. This indicates that while practical advantages encourage the use of e-books, students' reading experience and concentration levels are more decisive in determining their format preference.

The strong influence of focus is consistent with earlier

findings that printed books are often considered more suitable for deep concentration and comprehension. Budnyk et al. (2021) reported that over 70% of students relied on printed textbooks for critical understanding, while Singer and Alexander (2017) found that digital reading was mainly preferred for shorter and non-academic materials. Likewise, Peras et al. (2023) concluded that no single reading mode is universally superior, as reading outcomes depend on individual and contextual factors such as attention and learning environment. The present findings reinforce this view by showing that students' perceived ability to focus significantly affects their choice between e-books and printed books.

Convenience also showed a strong and significant effect on e-book preference, highlighting the importance of accessibility, portability, and ease of use. This result aligns with studies by Saiju et al. (2025), who found that students rated e-book features positively despite showing an overall preference for printed books. Similar patterns were observed by Caperida (2024) and Pandya et al. (2024), who emphasized accessibility and portability as key reasons for choosing digital resources. These consistent findings suggest that convenience remains a major motivating factor across different academic contexts, including Chitwan.

Cost was found to have a smaller yet statistically significant influence on students' preference for e-books. This supports the assumptions of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and Innovation Diffusion Theory (Lai & Rushikesh Ulhas, 2012), which emphasize perceived usefulness and relative advantage as important drivers of adoption. The availability of low-cost or free digital materials offers financial benefits to students, especially in settings where printed academic books may be costly or difficult to obtain.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the factors influencing students' preference for e-books over printed books

in academic contexts, focusing on cost, convenience, and the ability to maintain focus. The findings reveal that convenience is the most significant factor affecting e-book preference, highlighting students' prioritization of accessibility and portability in their academic reading. The ability to maintain focus also plays a notable role, indicating that while students appreciate the ease of e-books, printed books remain important for deep concentration and comprehension. In contrast, cost was not found to be a significant determinant, suggesting that students are willing to invest in resources that support effective learning, regardless of affordability. These insights contribute to a better understanding of academic reading preferences among university students in Chitwan, emphasizing the need for hybrid learning solutions that integrate the advantages of both digital and print resources. The study's findings can benefit educators, library managers, and publishers, e-book reader device developers by informing strategies to design academic materials that are both convenient and conducive to focused learning.

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