3;12:e85799. https://doi.org/10.2196/85799
5. Dohnány S, Kurth-Nelson Z, Spens E, Luettgau L, Reid AG, Summerfield C, et al. Technological folie à deux: Feedback Loops Between AI Chatbots and Mental Illness. 2025;*arXiv:*2507.19218v2. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2507.19218
6. Morrin H, Nicholls L, Levin M, Yiend J, Iyengar U, DelGuidice F, et al. Artificial intelligence-associated delusions and large language models: risks, mechanisms of delusion co-creation, and safeguarding strategies. *Lancet Psychiatry.* 2026;13(6):522-530. https://doi.org/10.1016/s2215-0366(25)00396-7
7. Keshavan M, Torous J, Yassin W. Do generative AI chatbots increase psychosis risk? *World Psychiatry.* 2026 Feb;25(1):150-1. https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.70017
8. Chamarthi VS, Das P, Kashyap R. AI as a Novel Digital Stressor in Adolescent Psychosis: Clinical and Ethical Implications. *Int J Psychiatry Med.* 2025 Oct 22:912174251392768. https://doi.org/10.1177/00912174251392768
9. Shrivasta R, Nieva R. Lonely Seniors Are Turning To AI Bots For Companionship. *Forbes.com.* 2025 Oct 21 [cited 2026 Feb 15]. Available from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/rashishrivastava/2025/10/18/lonely-seniors-are-turning-to-ai-bots-for-companionship/
10. Perlis RH, Gunning FM, Uslu AA, Santillana M, Baum MA, Druckmann JM, et al. Generative AI Use and Depressive Symptoms Among US Adults. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2026 Jan 2;9(1):e2554820. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.54820

Superficial knowledge acquisition in the digital era: A call to re-embrace books

LOKESH RANA, POOJA GURNAL

Over the past decade, academia has undergone a significant transformation in the manner in which knowledge is accessed, acquired and disseminated. Digital platforms, online resources and virtual learning tools and platforms have undoubtedly democratised education, improved accessibility and enabled rapid updates, along with facilitating learning across geographical and socioeconomic boundaries. These developments have brought substantial benefits to students and professionals alike [1,2].

However, all these developments come with caveats; the overwhelming reliance on digital modes of acquiring knowledge has led to unintended academic consequences. Students increasingly rely on online summaries, short-form content and algorithm-driven platforms for rapid consumption of information [2,3]. Though efficient, such learning is often superficial, fragmented, short-lived and offers little conceptual clarity, critical reasoning or long-lasting retention. This results in a growing disconnect between information acquisition and true understanding, thus posing a serious challenge to the future of academia, research and professional competence [2].

Books have represented the cornerstone of rigorous scholarship as they provide coherence, depth, continuity and a disciplined progression of thought, thus providing an essential contribution towards building a foundation across disciplines. The decimation of standard textbooks reflects not merely a change in medium but rather a deeper shift in academic culture, where convenience and immediacy increasingly replace mastery and reflection [3,4,5].

Recognising this serious concern, the Department of Radiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bilaspur, has initiated a structured "Back to Books" academic programme. This initiative emphasises compulsory textbook reading, guided chapter-based classroom discussions with structured assessments aligned closely with authoritative book content. The objective behind this initiative is not to reject digital learning but to establish a balance by reaffirming the primacy of foundational knowledge acquisition through books, completed and not replaced by digital resources.

This letter is a call to the wider academic community, across medicine and beyond, to reflect critically on current pedagogical trajectories. Digital technology should enhance learning, not dilute it. The reinstatement of book-based scholarship is not a mere exercise in nostalgia but a necessary step towards preserving academic rigor, intellectual depth and the quality of future professionals. A renewed commitment to books, alongside judicious use of digital tools, may offer the most sustainable path forward for contemporary education.

Authors: **Lokesh Rana** (corresponding author — dr.lokesh.radio@aiimsbilaspur.edu.in, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0970-6416), Associate Professor, Radiology, AIIMS, Bilaspur, INDIA; **Pooja Gurnal** (dr.pooja.anaes@aiimsbilapur.edu.in, https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9628-0829), Associate professor, Anaesthesia, AIIMS, Bilaspur, INDIA.

Conflict of Interest: None declared **Funding:** None

To cite: Rana L, Gurnal P. Superficial knowledge acquisition in the digital era: A call to re-embrace books. *Indian J Med Ethics.* 2026 Oct-Dec; 11(4) NS: 338. DOI: 10.20529/IJME.2026.043

Submission received: January 24, 2026

Submission accepted: May 28, 2026

Published online first: July 15, 2026

Copyright and license

©*Indian Journal of Medical Ethics* 2026: Open Access and Distributed under the Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits only non-commercial and non-modified sharing in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

References

1. Farinosi M, Lim C, Roll J. Book or screen, pen or keyboard? A cross-cultural sociological analysis of writing and reading habits based on Germany, Italy and the UK. *Telematics and Informatics.* 2016 ; 33(2): 410–421. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2015.09.006
2. ud Din Q. The lost art of reading. *Journal of Khyber College of Dentistry.* 2013;3(2):1. https://doi.org/10.33279/jkcd.v3i2.476
3. Kuhn A, Schwabe A, Boomgarden H, Brandl L, Stocker G, Lauer G, Brendel-Kepser I, Krause-Wolters M. Who gets lost? How digital academic reading impacts equal opportunity in higher education. *New Media & Society.* 2022;26(2):1034-1055. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211072306
4. Lupton D, Mewburn I, Thomson P, Editors. *The Digital Academic: Critical Perspectives on Digital Technologies in Higher Education.* 1st ed. Routledge; 2017. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315473611
5. Broadhurst D, Dale R, Harper J. Perspectives on e-books and digital textbooks and the way ahead. *Insights: the UKSG Journal.* 2022; 35(0): 19. https://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.599