Human & Social Sciences Journal

Volume 11, Issue 03, March 2026, P.P. 147-156.

From Page to Pixel: A Semiotic Analysis of How Mobile Interfaces Re-Frame the Narrative Structure of Prose Fiction

من الصفحة إلى البكسل: تحليل سيميائي لكيفية إعادة صياغة واجهات الهاتف المحمول للبنية السردية للرواية النثرية

De la page au pixel : une analyse sémiotique de la façon dont les interfaces mobiles reconfigurent la structure narrative de la fiction en prose

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Date of submission 28/01/2026 - Date of acceptation 06/03/2026 - Date of edition: 30/03/2026

ملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة التحولات العميقة في تجربة القراءة الأدبية من الكتب التقليدية إلى الشاشات الرقمية للهواتف المحمولة. ويلقي الضوء على الميزات المحددة للقراءة عبر الهاتف المحمول، من خلال تكييف أسلوب نوعي. ويركز على السمات السيميائية والنصوص السردية أثناء قراءة النصوص الأدبية. ويقدم شرحًا مفاهيميًا لتحقيق الانغماس العميق في قراءة الكتب التقليدية وتجربة القراءة المجزأة على الواجهات الرقمية، مثل التمرير والإشعارات وغيرها من الميزات، مما يكسر النصوص السردية. يضع هذا التغيير البنيوي القارئ في وضع الاكتشاف بدلاً من مجرد متلقي، مما يحوله من قارئ غامر يبحث عن معاني عميقة إلى مستخدم يتركز تركيزه عبر النصوص ومجموعة متنوعة من الخيارات والعناصر التفاعلية. لذل مما يحوله من قارئ غامر يبحث عن معاني عميقة إلى مستخدم يتركز تركيزه عبر النصوص ومجموعة متنوعة من الخيارات والعناصر التفاعلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القراءة على الهاتف المحمول؛ النصوص السردية؛ القراءة العميق؛ السيميائية؛ .واجهة الهاتف المحمول

Abstract:

This study explores the profound shifts in literary reading experience from traditional books to digital screens of mobile phones. It sheds light on the specific features of mobile reading, adapting a qualitative method. It focuses on semiotic features and narrative texts while reading literary texts. It presents a conceptual explanation to achieve deep immersion in reading traditional books and the experience of fragmented reading on digital interfaces, such as scrolling, notifications and other features, which breaks the narrative texts. This structural change puts the reader in a discovery mode instead of a mere recipient, transforming him from an immersive reader who seeks deep meanings to a user whose focus is fragmented across the texts and a variety of options and interactive elements.

Keywords: Mobile reading; Narrative texts; semiotic; Deep reading; Linearity; Mobile interfaces

Résumé :

Cette étude analyse, via une approche qualitative, la transition de la lecture littéraire papier vers les écrans mobiles. En examinant les traits sémiotiques et les structures narratives, elle oppose l'immersion profonde traditionnelle à l'expérience fragmentée des interfaces numériques. Des fonctionnalités telles que le défilement et les notifications rompent la linéarité du récit, transformant le lecteur contemplatif en un « utilisateur-explorateur » dont l'attention est dispersée par des éléments interactifs. Ce changement structurel redéfinit le rôle du lecteur, désormais sollicité par une multitude d'options techniques plutôt que par le seul texte. En conséquence, l'habitude d'une lecture numérique rapide et superficielle affaiblit les capacités de compréhension des œuvres complexes ainsi que les compétences d'analyse profonde et de réflexion.

Mots clés : Analyse sémiotique ; Interfaces mobiles ; Structure narrative ; Immersion profonde ; Lecture fragmentée

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Introduction

Mobile reading has rapidly shifted prose narrative texts from traditional books to screens of smartphones. Narrative texts are now easily accessible through scrolling on touch screens, hyperlinks, and notifications. Not only does this shift moves the text to a small screen, but also restructures the ways in how stories are read and perceived by readers. Research on reading novels suing interactive, digital platforms deliberately challenges the traditional ways of reading books, emphasizing the contrast between the reader's attitude and role between the two reading methods.

In recent years, the smartphone has transitioned from a mere communication tool into our primary gateway for consuming written content. The comfort it provides in accessing great library at any instant in deniable, sot this transition encompasses, not only the replacing paper with pixels, but also moving to a complex digital medium to interact with the texts we read. In contrast to the silent, fixed nature of printed books, the interface of mobile phones is "loud" one that is full of constant interruptions, such as frequent notifications, scrolling, and the temptations of navigating an intricate digital system. This development raises profound concerns related to the change of reading means and the potential of affecting our relationship with the narrative texts. The central problem addressed in this research is that mobile interfaces are designed for efficiency and multitasking, qualities that stand in direct opposition to the deep, linear immersion required by prose fiction. A printed book encourages a focused following a focused, unique path through the text, but semiotic features of the smart phone reframe the story, considering it as a mere one option from several others. This leads to a shallower effect, as the reader is not a passive recipient to a world created by the author, but the reader becomes a user whose attention is scattered in across a fragmented interface. The issue that educators currently face, therefore, is a gap in the mechanisms of understanding how do the options of the interface design fragment and reframe the narrative flow, which can weaken the ability to think deeply in complex narrative texts.

To explore this shift, this study investigates how the digital architecture of mobile devices redefines the act of reading. Specifically, the research is guided by two primary questions: First, in what ways do the semiotic features of mobile interfaces, such as scrolling, notifications, and hyperlinks, disrupt and re-frame the traditional narrative structure of prose fiction? Second, how does the reader's role evolve when transitioning from the "deep immersion" of a printed book to the fragmented, "exploratory" state induced by mobile screens? By answering these questions, this paper seeks to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the future of literary engagement in an increasingly digitized world.

1- Semiotic Features and the Fragmentation of the Narrative

Reading interfaces on mobile phones introduce various features including scrolling, hyperlinks, and notification which can alter the traditional narrative structure. The variety of links encourage visual discovery and navigation as readers are required to make constant decisions when delving into the story. This shifts the focus of the controlling the narrative from the author to the reader (Sitinjak, 2025; Corbitt et al., 2021; Mazlan et al., 2025; Kaloi et al., 2025; Bell & Ensslin,

2024). Also, the notifications and visual signs may hinder the reading experience and, making the reader suffer from constant drain when making decisions, especially in stories that are based on hyperlinks (Mazlan et al., 2025; Bus et al., 2015; James, 2025; Bell & Ensslin, 2024). These features can redefine the narrative structure and makes the experience of reading using mobile phones more challenging than traditional narrative texts.

The integration of interactive elements like pictures and videos increases the complexity of the reading experience on mobile phones. These elements, despite the fact that they reinforce the narrative scope, they can hinder the narrative flow, as readers are required to interact with different layers of the content at the same time. Therefore, with traditional reading, the focus is put only on written words, unlike mobile reading, which requires a higher level of cognitive effort, making readers obliged to navigate from understanding the written text and explain the visual signs at the same time. This constant interaction with the reading environment can interrupt the reading experience, which makes it more difficult for readers to be fully immersed into the story. In addition, the interactive elements provide various options that encourage readers to follow different tracks rather than staying on the same cohesive experience.

2- Narrative Structure and Linearity

Research about digital literature show that when reading texts and stories through on screens alters linearity. This way or reading involves, just like reading through mobile phones, clicking and selecting links in a way that breaks linearity and guides the reader through various possible pathways (Hagen & Mills, 2022; Haverkamp et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2022). In most cases, this reading approach puts the reader in an explorer state, rather than being a passive recipient of the text. This shift in reading dynamics transforms the act of reading from a linear, immersive activity into a fragmented and multitasking experience.

Digital narrative texts redefine the setting (time and place) of the story. Researchers report that screen features including the dashboard, scrolling, and others, deviates the readers' focus from the plot of the story to an several other overlapping options. Readers often find themselves navigating between the text and the surrounding digital environment, where the boundaries between the story and external distractions blur. In addition, updates, screen recording, and notifications, are common features surrounding the reader's experience when reading through screens (Isamiddinovna, 2025; Hagen & Mills, 2022; Yu et al., 2022). The presence of interactive elements and external notifications encourages constant engagement, but not necessarily with the story itself. This not only alters how stories are consumed but also changes the cognitive processes involved in understanding and interpreting them. Readers are required to maintain a heightened level of attention and decision-making as they move through non-linear pathways that demand constant evaluation of what to explore next

3- Reading On Screens and Scrolling

Other research papers investigated the effects of screens on the reader's behaviour. They point out that reading short, decontextualized literary texts through screens for a long time can encourage quick navigation through texts and scrolling, which is known as "shallowing hypothesis". This shift in reading dynamics transforms the act of reading from a linear, immersive activity into a fragmented and multitasking experience. Experiments reveal that people who frequently read short texts on screens are less inclined to continue reading longer, more demanding literary texts, as well

as being less likely to reflect deeply on its meanings (Hakemulder & Mangen, 2024). Similarly, other studies, with children, look deeper into the features of screens, as they compared standard digital texts with versions that contain hyperlinks and require scrolling and found that comprehension has dropped when with hyperlinks texts despite the fact that scrolling alone did not affect the performance (Krenca et al., 2024). The presence of interactive elements, such as hyperlinks, encourages constant engagement but not necessarily with the story itself, as readers are often compelled to juggle between following the text and responding to the demands of the digital interface. However, for university students, paging supports a better integrated comprehension, especially when the continuous scrolling is done on a large tablet, which can be more pleasant than using a small phone. This points to how the cognitive processes involved in reading on screens are affected not only by the content but also by the design and size of the device, requiring readers to maintain a heightened level of attention and decision-making to process information effectively.

4- Reading and Motivation

Research indicates that university students use their smart phones for reading due to several reasons. Phones can easily be hold and used as reading tools, for they are always accessible, and students are used to them in their daily life activities. Nevertheless, these phones can have some disadvantages (Liu et al., 2023; Sheng, 2025; Lin et al., 2020; Nichter, 2021). Studies focusing on Chinese students found that college students do not use their phones only for entertainment purposes, but they use them for a variety of academic tasks, as well as social tools to stay connected with people around them, which fosters their sense of belonging (Liu et al., 2023). This shows that smart phones are accessible, so they can facilitate reading, leading students to use them at their own conveniences. This shift in reading dynamics transforms the act of reading from a linear, immersive activity into a fragmented and multitasking experience.

In addition, some research on reading on smart phones report that they can increase students' motivation and autonomy. This happens when the tasks are well-structured and include instant feedback (Misdi et al., 2023; Sheng, 2025; Booton et al., 2021; McKenna et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2022). he presence of notifications, app alerts, and other distractions often interrupts the flow of reading, forcing students to juggle between academic tasks and external stimuli. But, the benefits of reading using smart phones are not always the same. While smartphones can enhance motivation and autonomy, they also place greater cognitive demands on students, as attention is divided between engaging with the text and navigating the digital environment. Students may be faced with challenges like problems with keeping attention and being overly dependent on these devices, which may hinder their chances of developing their reading skills (Booton et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020). This fragmented experience can reduce focus, making it harder for students to engage deeply with more complex or demanding texts, ultimately affecting their overall reading comprehension and skill development.

5- Mobile Apps and Reading Literary Texts

Some researchers in the field of teaching language and literature argue that the apps dedicated for literary stories on mobile phones can deepen students' understanding. These apps vocabulary lists, notes and quizzes, in addition to spaces for discussion about different elements of fiction including characters, plot, narrative perspective, symbols, figurative language (Al-Jarf, 2022). Also, studies indicate that the learning process that is based on apps of literary stories facilitates

comprehension, appreciations of literature, texts analysis. Besides, it leads to rising desire to read and discuss literary texts (Sánchez-Rivas et al., 2022; Al-Jarf, 2022).

Educational activities that are based on narratives through mobile phones seems to have a positive impact when compared to traditional activities. Using mobile phones in teaching literature increases participation, willingness to learn, and satisfaction towards in the class (Sánchez-Rivas et al., 2022). This shows that using them gives both teachers and students more opportunities to make the teaching materials more effective and even more interesting.

However, the same features that make mobile apps more compelling can also have a negative impact on students' attention. These apps must be used properly and carefully In the class in order prevent any undesirable outcomes, especially with slow and careful reading, as well as completing tasks (Sánchez-Rivas et al., 2022; Booton et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020). Therefore, the boundaries between reading an actual book of a literary text and using an app to read the same book can be often blurred.

6- Self-Regulation and Mobile Reading Outcomes

Research on teaching literature through mobile apps point out the significance of self-regulation. They claim that extensive use of mobile phones increases the importance of adjusting the learning environment and select appropriate activities to improve the learning outcomes (Nichter, 2021). This does not always yield the desired results with learners' tendency and willingness to study literary texts; however, the use of mobile phones and social media tools can reinforce participation and emotional responses to the texts with some challenges to keep attention and focus with the contents of the same texts (Yu et al., 2022).

Some review papers on mobile supported "activity theory" highlight the complex interaction involved in reading literary texts. The tasks and activities that are well-designed for reading purposes on mobile phones can support self-learning and autonomy; however, if they are not carefully designed, they may lead students to have superficial and fragmented interaction (Booton et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020).

This shows that using mobile phones in reading tasks facilitates the access and understanding of fiction, but they, at the same time, can be complex to navigate as they include a variety of choices that keep students scrolling through. This makes them more demanding and require more attention and consideration to achieve the desirable learning outcomes including engagement, reflection and apprectaion of literature (Hakemulder & Mangen, 2024; Booton et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2020; Nichter, 2021).

7- The Reader's Role and the Interactive Elements

The interactive elements of texts in mobile phones and digital platforms change the reader's role. Research shows that readers using that tools perceive reading as a participatory process, enabling them to expand and customize the narrative texts through the various features available. Readers, therefore, are more in control of the different resources (Aliagas & Margallo, 2017; Sitinjak, 2025; Hossain, 2025; Corbitt et al., 2021; Mazlan et al., 2025; Kaloi et al., 2025; Bell & Ensslin, 2024). Such platforms give readers a plenty of features and resources which they can navigate freely. This makes reading a more enjoyable and accessible experience.

This shift from the passive reception to the active navigation makes a fundamental transformation in the traditional hierarchy between the author and the audience. When readers

interact with the multiple layers of media, including hyperlinks or comments at the same time, they move beyond the constraints of the static page to become contributors in the construction of the narrative experience. This increasing feeling of interaction reinforces deep empathy with the narrative text as well as encourages readers to develop their critical thinking skills, as they are required to take evaluation choices about the paths which they follow. Besides, the ability to focus on the aesthetic and functional features of the text yields a digital reading environment that fits the epistemological and individual preferences, making the text more comprehensive to a wide variety of readers. That said, the fluidity of mobile platforms has transformed the act of reading into a dynamic, multi-sensory journey, where the boundaries of the text are no longer fixed, but redefined through a unique series of reader interactions and personal inquiries.

Studies reveal a discrepancy in results related to effects of mobile reading features on the reader's interaction. The interactive elements like instant notification and hyperlinks reinforce engagement and vocabulary retention (Al-Jarf, 2022; Aliagas & Margallo, 2017; Hossain, 2025). However, these same features can distract readers' attention and make keeping pace with complex stories more challenging (Mazlan et al., 2025; Bus et al., 2015; James, 2025). This makes the effectiveness of the elements dependent on a variety of features including the readers' age, their digital background, and the learning context in which the mobile phones are used for reading (Al-Jarf, 2022; Aliagas & Margallo, 2017).

Given these conflicting outcomes, it becomes evident that the mere presence of interactive technology does not inherently guarantee an improved reading experience. Its success depends on the delicate balance between the epistemological stimulation and sensory overload. For younger or less experienced readers, the allure of "gamified" features and frequent pop-up notifications can fragment the cognitive focus necessary for deep immersion, leading to a superficial engagement where the mechanics of the platform overshadow the substance of the text. In contrast, for digitally literate users, or students in structured learning environments, these same tools can play a vital role in clarifying complex terminology and provides immediate context, thereby bridging the gap between decoding and comprehension. This necessitates a more sophisticated approach to digital pedagogy and application design, where interactive elements are strategically implemented to match the developmental stage

8- Methodology

This study employs a qualitative theoretical structure based on semiotics and narratives. It investigates the ways in which semiotic features of mobile phones, like scrolling, hyperlinks, and notifications shape the narrative structure of prose fiction. This research aims at presenting a conceptual explanation of how reading an actual printed book transforms to reading from a screen, and how the reader's role shifts from being a deep reader, inclined to be involved in the text, to a user whose attention is distributed to a variety of signs and options.

This study is based on three main theoretical approaches. First, semiotics, which is considers the printed books as well as screens systems of signs. Second, narratives that provide some concepts and elements including plot, setting, narrative focus, describing how the plot is structured. Third, theories of reading and attention, which distinguishes between deep involvement and fragmented reading experiences with digital screens. These three frameworks establish an order of classifying narrative prose on books, and then moves to describe the reading context on mobile phones as an

extensive field of paratexts and interface elements, such as icons, lists, and notifications, that surround and overlap with the text.

Through a comparative analysis that is based on concepts, this study explores the effects of interfaces on the narrative texts. In addition, it sheds light on these features, considering how they create a side textual structure which can either hinder or redefines immersion with the narrative. Through this analysis, the study develops a conceptual framework, showing the shift in the reader's role from a reader to a user, then it presents the potential effects and consequences of this shift on students' participation and learning.

9- Discussion and Analysis

This study reveals that reading interfaces on mobile phones reframes the reading experience. They restructure the narrative texts through ways readers interact with them, making them less focused and lacking deep attention, as they can easily be directed toward multiple choices (Hayles, 2012; Baron, 2021; Wolf, 2018). The weakening of the narrative boundaries through constant scrolling makes the flow of texts less unified, unlike traditional ways of reading. In addition, navigating through pages and chapters leads to splitting the plot of stories, making the reading process more challenging for readers as they struggle to keep attention through the development of the events, especially with less experienced readers who are still working on developing their reading skills. This explains, partly, the findings of experimental studies about the decrease in comprehension and memorization issues of the plot events in digital platforms.

The prevalent interface elements in digital reading platforms reframes the act of reading, changing it from an individual task to an option from many others. This determines the relationship between the reader and the text, as the frames and applications used for reading makes the authority of the text relatively effective (Genette, 1997; Hayles, 2012). This change in how we read shifts the process from a focused, immersive experience to one that is fragmented and filled with multitasking. This dynamic encourages the reader to adapt an interactive position that is featured by a constant attentional selection instead of a deep immersion in the text. Constant interruptions from notifications, alerts, and other distractions break the flow of reading, requiring readers to split their attention between the text and external demands. In the long term, this may lead to normalizing the habits of shallow reading and quick switching among various contexts, which is a source of concern for readers in digital screens (Carr, 2010; Baron, 2021). This disjointed way of reading weakens focus, making it more difficult for readers to fully engage with complex or challenging material, which can hinder the development of deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills.

In educational settings, the results indicate some challenges. First, they show that the difficulties which readers face with narrative texts result only from the lack of discipline and motivation. The semiotic structure of mobile reading interfaces is designed to reinforce multitasking, and instant reading, in addition to being always available, which makes deep and uninterrupted immersion into with literary texts more difficult (Hayles, 2012; Wolf, 2018). The results call for epistemological and structural educational responses. Educators may need to transfer knowledge through clear strategies to manage notifications and organize reading sessions, in addition to use digital means selectively instead of using them randomly. Besides, reading apps designers can discover the elements which influence the readers' attention and interaction. This can make reading through digital tools more effective.

Eventually, switching from traditional reading to digital reading raises questions about how the means of reading affect the narrative experience generally. The relationship is investigated to determine whether this shift to digital reading methods reinforces of weakens the immersion depth into the texts. In educational settings, it might be necessary to rethink about the ways of designing reading interfaces, so they consider the epistemological developments of students and provide the tools to help to reduce the epistemological burden and reinforce the deep comprehension of the narrative. In addition, the challenges stemming from the interaction with digital texts requires readers and educators to work on developing new strategies to yield a deep reading experience, especially in an age when the reliance on digital tools as basic means for learning is growing stronger.

This necessitates a multifaceted approach that not only focuses on the technological aspects of digital reading but also incorporates cognitive and pedagogical frameworks to enhance the learning experience. For instance, educators may need to explore the concept of "digital literacy," which goes beyond mere familiarity with devices and platforms. It encompasses critical thinking skills, the ability to evaluate sources, and understanding the nuances of digital content consumption. Moreover, research indicates that the sensory experience of reading on screens can differ markedly from that of reading printed materials. Factors such as screen glare, scrolling dynamics, and the presence of Hyperlinks can disrupt a reader's flow and comprehension. Thus, it becomes crucial to investigate how these elements influence attention spans and retention rates among college students. In light of this, educational institutions could benefit from developing hybrid reading programs that integrate both traditional and digital formats.

Such programs would allow students to experience the tactile engagement of physical books while also harnessing the interactive and multimedia advantages of digital texts. For instance, incorporating note-taking apps, annotation features, and interactive discussion forums could foster collaborative learning and a deeper understanding of the material. Additionally, it is essential to encourage metacognitive strategies among students, prompting them to reflect on their reading processes and the effectiveness of various mediums. By engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback, students can become more aware of their reading habits and adapt their approaches accordingly. Ultimately, the transition from traditional to digital reading is not merely a technological shift; it is an opportunity to rethink and enrich the narrative experience. By addressing the challenges posed by digital texts and leveraging the strengths of both mediums, educators can create an immersive learning environment that fosters critical engagement with literature and enhances the overall educational journey for college

students.

10- Conclusion

This Study sheds light on how reading prose fiction on mobile devices is more than a simple transition from one tool to another, rather it is a basic shift in the ways that stories are arranged and experiences. Features like constant scrolling, the omnipresence of interface elements, the frequent interruptions of notifications, and the facility of navigation affect the reader’s role. Instead of being a deep reader, the reader becomes a user expected to do multiple tasks, as reading becomes fragmented, making attention less naturally consistent. For students, this transition has critical

consequences. The struggle to focus, keeping attention with narratives, and being deeply engaged with texts are not merely personal failings. Instead, these can be considered as the implications of the specific design of reading on mobile phones. By this acknowledgment, we can begin to see a digital reading as a unique experience to increase literacy, that comes with new possibilities and new challenges. It requires certain skills and strategies which differ significantly from those associated with traditional print reading.

In order to make mobile reading and platforms less distracting, designers should focus on making easier to use and remove less relevant elements. Reducing the unnecessary elements can make readers more focused on the narrative text, which increase their attention and engagement toward them, so they can better follow the stories which they read. In contrast, other elements can be helpful to readers, as they facilitate their reading experience. These include bookmarks, built-in notes, and other similar ones which readers can use to quickly navigate through the texts, saving pages, taking notes. This contributes to their understanding and engagement with the stories they read, keeping their attention on the text.

Thinking about mobile reading this way opens up new research ideas. For example, we could study how well people understand stories on different devices, track where their attention goes using interaction logs or eye-tracking, test features like reader modes or short breaks, and look at how regular mobile reading affects deep reading skills over time. By seeing mobile reading as a unique experience, educators and designers can create better tools and strategies to help students build strong, focused reading habits on digital devices. Future research can be conducted with a more experimental design that considers the use of mobile phones in reading prose fiction. For instance, research papers may focus on how can reading on screens made more effective way of reading in literature classes, with its specific features, including scrolling, notifications, links, and the interface elements from which readers navigate a variety of contents. When carefully utilized, mobile reading can be a beneficial way that make reading more enjoyable and engaging to literature students when reading literary texts, for they are familiar to their daily life experiences.

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