

An Analysis of the Newspaper Reading Habits of University Students

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Abstract

Newspapers have decisively influenced the destiny of India as a nation especially during the nationalist movement. India witnessed a newspaper revolution in 1970s and continues to have a very strong newspaper industry. The emergence of new media has brought about fundamental changes to the process and practice of newspaper journalism. The weakening of newspapers is crucial when viewed along with its political importance and fuelling the spirit of nationalism as ascribed by Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan and Benedict Anderson. India with the demographic dividend of large youth population treads to the future on the choices of the youths. Their attitude to the newspapers obviously point to the future of newspaper industry in the digital world that is projected as in making. Studies on the information technology point to the fast growing digital landscape of India and this study is on a track of a reality check about the media consumption mode of the youth population of India. The pattern of young people's newspaper reading and the levels of exposure to the news content and newspaper are analyzed in the paper.

Keywords: Newspaper, new media, young readers, newspaper reading pattern.

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INTRODUCTION

The process and technology of media communication have come across immense transformation over these years. New media of every age had weakened the world's oldest and strongest medium. Print media are at a

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historical juncture of reinventing its space and significance. Over the last 10 years print media have lost ground in the digital media boom, facing competition from smart phones, iPads, Internet, social media and many other digital media. Many major media houses have closed down in recent years failing to meet the complex competition from the multifaceted possibilities of new media. The innate thrive for survival of the print media industry have led, on the other end, to get renovated to the convergence by making the content available online and in diverse digital forms. Indian print business stood significantly different from the ambience of global scenario. Circulation and readership surveys show the clear positive indication about the print media industry, especially of the newspaper segment. Observations beyond the present hypes might point to the new media potentials overpowering Indian newspapers in the near future as Robin Jeffrey had remarked in his book 'India's Newspaper Revolution' (2001). This paper is an effort to look into the future of Indian newspaper industry against the demographical distinctiveness of the present India. The demographical stature of India depicts a bright dimension of a significant number of youth populations at 362 million, that is the 28% of the total population and is between the age of 10-24 years in 2013. India is home to 1.21 billion people (2011 Census statistics) and has more than 50 per cent of its population below the age of 25 and more than 65 per cent below the age of 35. Right now, its median age is 25 years and it is expected that in 2020, the average age of an Indian will be 29 years, compared to 37 for China and 48 for Japan. This demographic dividend and its leniency towards new media might have an effect on the future of the newspaper industry of India. The fall of the credibility stake of newspapers and the blemishes like paid news are also significant factors in this discussion. The proposed paper is aiming to track the youth trends towards newspaper as a medium, encompassing the dimensions like the pattern, frequency and the nature of newspaper reading.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Print newspapers had a significant political signature as that had ignited nationalism and the spirit of vernaculars. Marshal McLuhan considered print technology had the power to create “massive groupings by means of vernacular nationalism” (1969, p. 258). Harold Innis also theorize in the same pattern when writing: “The effect of the discovery of printing was evident... hastened the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism...” (1951, p. 29) Benedict Anderson states the role of print newspapers as essential for public sphere which provides a platform for rational debate for intelligent citizens. Newspapers create a common language adherent to the emotions of nationalism (Jeffrey, 2009).

Robin Jeffrey (2011) who has widely written about the reality and prospective of Indian newspaper industry speaks of the Indian newspaper revolution between 1977- 1990. The number of the copies has been multiplied along with the availability of diverse content. The design, perspective and functioning process of the newspaper houses evolved positively for the expansion of the medium. The growth of the newspapers has resulted in influencing the way people behaved politically too.

The influx of new media has transformed the newspaper industry in a significant manner as the process and practice of journalism had been moved by it. A great number of readers have shifted towards new media possibilities including the social media with clear variations in the concept about ‘news’ itself. The emergence of new media has affected the newspaper industry and the online technologies were applied by the newspaper managements (Salman, Ibrahim, Abdullah, Mustaffa, & Mahbob, 2011; Anderson & Caumont, 2014).

Various studies assess the pattern of newspaper reading among youths. The majority is spending less than an hour for daily newspaper reading and prefers reading entertainment and sports news to the political and the ilk. Print version is popular among the youth while compared to the online version. The main source of newspaper reading of the students is self-subscription,

followed by university library and students' hostel. Majority of the youth readers prefer regional/local language to English (Majumder & Hasan, 2013; Kumar, Siddiqui, & Singh, 2011). Bankole and Babalola (2011) found that the students preferred libraries for reading newspapers and their priorities were gaining information on public affairs, sporting events and health matters. The goal of newspaper reading was a mix of gaining information and a time of recreation. Researchers had studied the reason for young people' less interest in newspapers across the globe and the findings carry similar pattern. Inconvenience and lack of time appear as two main reasons. Non-availability and crowded public libraries also are attributed as causes with the flux of negative news (Zerba, 2011; Bankole & Babalola, 2011).

A study of Jaume I University of Castellon students, Spain shows a clear decrease in news consumption among young people between 16 and 30 years of age. Three out of every four respondents of the study use social networking sites than any news platforms like newspaper and television. A small 28 % under study read newspaper on a regular basis and reluctance to pay for accessing current news is evident (Casero-Ripollés, 2012).

The reading pattern is influenced by several factors like levels of income, education, age, geographical factors and ethnic background. Home environment is also found as a significant element in influencing the reading habits and frequencies. Parents and elders with regular reading habits and positive influences like home libraries enkindle affinity to reading. The studies have shown that youth are increasingly turning towards Internet for gathering information and the uses hitherto relied on newspaper and magazines (Kwong, Othman, & Rajeswari, 2005).

OBJECTIVES

The newspaper reading pattern can be linked with ones exposure to the reality of the society and to the political statements. Decreasing newspaper reading might be pointing to a more apolitical social reality. New media platforms pose challenges to the newspapers and the youth comprise the

larger segment of new media consumers. Since the young population credit the majority in India, the assessment of their stance to newspaper reading can very well point to the future of newspapers.

- To study the newspaper reading pattern of young people
- To analyze the levels of exposure of the young people to print and new media formats of news
- To examine the reach of the online newspaper among the young people
- To study the choice of the resources by young people in accessing news

METHODOLOGY

Locale of the study is North Karnataka and the sample consisted of post graduate students of Karnatak University, which hosts students from different parts of the region. Karnatak University is situated at Dharwad, the cultural capital of North Karnataka and a major educational hub. The population under study is the post graduate students of 41 departments of Karnatak University, Dharwad, India. This region is frequently referred as backward in development index and as lacking government projects compared to other regions. Karnataka's first Human Development Index for gram panchayats considering 11 indicators spread across three sectors - standard of living (access to electricity, toilets, safe drinking water), health (child and maternal deaths) and education (primary and secondary schooling) show that the districts of North Karnataka persist with poor standard of living, low education and health indicators below the state average (DHNS, 2015).

A sample of 240 students was selected through convenience sampling from four major faculties of education, viz. arts, science, commerce and management with equal number of male and female respondents. Survey method was employed with a structured questionnaire as a tool of data collection. The data was analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics, cross tabulation and chi-square test.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data reveals a clear preference of the young people under study towards print newspapers. 26.7 % of the respondents are from the stream of Science, 28.3% from Arts, 20% from Commerce and 25 % are from the management stream. 96 % of males and the 93 % of the females have the habit of regular newspaper reading ($p=.375>.05$). A significant majority of 70.8 % of the respondents read only some parts of the newspaper, 20.8 % read most of a newspaper and only 8.3 read the whole newspaper.

Table 1.
Table Showing Frequency of Newspaper Reading by the Respondents

Frequency	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Everyday	92 76.7%	44 36.7%	136 56.7%
2-3 times in a week	24 20.0%	60 50.0%	84 35.0%
Occasionally	4 3.3%	16 13.3%	20 8.3%
Total	120 100.0%	120 100.0%	240 100.0%

Table 1 shows the extent of newspaper reading among the students. A significant 56.7 % read newspaper everyday and 35 % read 2-3 times a week. 76% males and 36 % females read newspapers every day, 24 % males and 60% females read newspaper 2-3 times in a week; and 4% males and 16% females read newspaper occasionally. The gender variation in the reading pattern is statistically significant ($p=.000<.05$). It may be inferred that preference of frequency of reading newspaper is dependent on gender wherein both males and females differ in frequency of reading newspaper.

Table 2- Table Showing Duration of Newspaper Reading

Duration	Gender		Total
	male	female	
<30 minutes	48 40.0%	84 70.0%	132 55.0%
30-60 minutes	56 46.7%	36 30.0%	92 38.3%
1-2 hours	16 13.3%	0 .0%	16 6.7%
Total	120 100.0%	120 100.0%	240 100.0%

Table 2 illustrates the time spent for newspaper reading every day. 55% of the total respondents read newspaper less than 30 minutes every day, and 38.3 % of the respondents read newspaper every day for a duration between 30 and 60 minutes; and a small share of the respondents 6.7% read more than one hour a day. The variation on the duration of reading according to gender difference is statistically significant ($p=.000<.05$). It may be inferred that newspaper reading is dependent on gender wherein both males and females differ in the amount of time spent on reading newspapers. 50 % of the respondents feel that lack of time is the reason for not reading newspaper long time while 29 % are not interested in newspaper reading and for the rest (20%) newspapers are not available. Among the reasons for reading newspaper, the top of the list is gaining knowledge/general news with about 88 % and gaining local news/information (44%) coming next.

Table 3- Preference of Content

Type of News	Male	Female	Total
News	73.3%	50.0%	61.7%
Celebrity news	10.0%	26.7%	18.3%
Sports	10.0%	3.3%	6.7%
Business	6.7%	20.0%	13.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3 exhibits the respondents' choice and preference of reading. A majority 61.7 % looks for news, 18.3 % interested in celebrity news, 13.3 % go for business news and 6.7 % interested in sports related news. The choice of news items significantly differ according to gender difference ($p=.000<.05$). It may be inferred that preference of news content is dependent on gender wherein both males and females differ in their preference of news.

Table 4 Preference of Media Accessing News

Media	Male	Female	Total
Print newspaper	75.0%	73.3%	74.2%
Online newspaper	25.0%	23.3%	24.2%
mobile/apps	.0%	3.3%	1.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4 shows the media used for accessing news. Majority of the respondents (74.2%) access news through print newspaper, 24.2 % read news from online newspapers and a meagre 1.7% only employ smart phones as source of news. There is no significant difference in the method of accessing news with regard to gender ($p=.129>.05$). It may be inferred that preference of media for accessing news is independent of gender which means that irrespective of gender people access news through different media.

Table 5- Source of News Accessed

Mode of Media	Swatch Bharath	Kashmir Floods	Muzaffarnagar riots	2104 General election results
Print newspaper	68.3%	55.0%	26.7%	56.7%
Online newspaper	8.3%	11.7%	11.7%	13.3%
Social media	15.0%	16.7%	20.0%	16.7%
Friends	3.3%	6.7%	5.0%	5.0%
Television	5.0%	3.3%	1.7%	8.3%
Haven't heard	00.0%	6.7%	35.0%	00.0%
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 5 demonstrates the specific cases of accessing news on four major news events. The respondents were asked how they came to know about four major newspaper headlines of 2014 in order to assess their mode of accessing news. The campaign of 'Swatch Bharath', Kashmir floods of 2014, Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013 and general election results of 2014 were the major news events included in the questionnaire. Majority of the respondents got to know about the above said news items from print newspaper (*Swatch Bharath*-68.3%, Kashmir floods- 55.0%, Muzaffarnagar riots - 26.7% , 2104 General election results- 56.7%). After print newspaper, social media occupies the second position as a source of information (*Swatch Bharath*-15%, Kashmir floods- 16.7%, Muzaffarnagar riots - 20%, 2104 General election results- 16.7%). Online newspapers share a small part as the source of information like *Swatch Bharath*-8.3%, Kashmir floods- 11.7%, Muzaffarnagar riots - 11.7%, 2104 General election results- 13.3%). The key source of gathering news according to the observation is print newspaper.

Table 6- Reason for Preferring Online News Consumption

Reasons for preferring online news consumption	Frequency	Percent
Saves Time	66	27.5
Easily Available	114	47.5
Saves Money	60	25.0
Total	240	100.0

Table 6 explains the reason for choosing online news possibilities. The easy availability (47.5 %), saving money compared to subscribing personal copy of print news (27.5 %) and saving time (25 %) are among the motives for liking online news consumption. 71.7 % of the respondents have said that they would like to access online newspapers if they are available and the remaining 23.7% do not like to read newspapers online.

Table – 7 Media Choice for Future

Media	Frequency	Percent
Print newspaper	108	45.0
Online newspaper	104	43.3
Social media	28	11.7
Total	240	100.0

Table 7 represents the possible choice of media for accessing news in the self-deciding future. Several options are restrained in the stage of students' life including the selection of media by several factors like availability of resources, the provisions at public sources like college libraries and the choices of the elders at home. A significant 45 % of the respondents are of the opinion that they would be choosing print newspapers as the source of gathering news in the future of self-dependency. 43.3 % will go online newspapers and only a small 11.7% will look for news and information from social media formats.

The use of new media platforms is increasing among young people of India and the youth are the beneficiaries.

CONCLUSION

Newspapers continue to function as the major source of news and still the traditional affinity to the print version is in the roll. Majority of the respondents have the habit of newspaper reading and about 93% read newspapers frequently. Sizeable portion of the respondents depend on print newspaper and the new media possibilities for accessing news do not have significant impact on the specific population under study. The frequency and the time spent for reading are fair and the majority looks for news and information. Students depend largely on public spaces like libraries for accessing newspaper. Students are interested in the new media oriented news access and, availability and getting initiated to it are the vital factors.

The shift to the new media formats for accessing news is slender

compared to the young population of the West. As per this study, the claims of digital India in making are not in tune with the actual use of technological possibilities for gathering news. The assumption of new media overpowering newspaper, especially the print form, remains to be just a future possibility according to the study. But the shift, though slight at present, points to the revolution of media consumption pattern in the offing.

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