

The Habits of Online Newspaper Readers in India

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Abstract

An online survey was conducted among 3,183 online news consumers of India. The aim of the survey was to know the reading habits of online readers. The questionnaire was sent through the e-recourses like e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. The study found that women and men consume online news in a slightly different manner. Women prefer to read information related to entertainment, development, health, education, and features. Men prefer political, sports, crime, business, and defence related news. More than half of the respondents (62.6%) have the subscription of online newspapers but it will reduce when online newspaper will start paid subscription as 71% respondents says they will not subscribe paid online news. As many as 56% respondents share the news with others, 67.7% say they don't write comments and 58% respondents like the 24×7 news updates. The Times of India is the most readable (43.5%) online news source among the respondents followed by Social Media (41%).

Keywords: Online news; Online media; Online news consumer; Social media; Reading habits

Introduction

Electronics and Information Technology is one of the fastest growing segments of the Indian Industry. India is considered world's fastest-growing newspaper market. After the falling broadband prices, fast internet speed and budget Smartphone in India, more and more people are consuming online news. A report by Comscore Inc (2013) [1]. Says Indian news and information websites drew an additional 9.4 million readers in August when compared with a year ago, a 34% increase. Online media is different from newspapers, radio, and television in its perception and reception from the reader's point of view. It takes news to the reader easily and provides related links which appeared on the issue in the recent past. Most of the news portals allow their readers to comment on the information, giving them a window for feedback. Recent research shows that online news consumption rose sharply in recent years, coupled with the costs and technological challenges of the rapid advance of the mobile era [2].

The *Chicago Tribune* was the pioneer in publishing an online newspaper in 1992 [3]. After that, online media has grown significantly. Internet has considerably influenced journalism as it has spread to every sphere of human life.

Internet has become major source of communication in the present world and reading news is the fourth popular internet activity among the respondents in USA [4]. As per the various scholars, use of internet and computer-mediated communication is increasing [5-7].

Internet has become an important source of information and provides knowledge of different segments of the society. All the major newspapers of India have started their e-papers and news websites. 24×7 online news has become a vital part of modern society. It has grown so much that it is rendering the print media obsolete in some parts of the world. Even in India a lot of newspaper readers now prefer reading online newspapers. Online communication system is changing rapidly day by day. It is now much easier to access information available on internet. The hyperlink on the news sites gives extraordinary control over the news consumption process. Experts of new communication technologies explain that the new media would remove a lot of barriers between audiences and information. New technologies are changing news-reading habits. Interactive nature of internet allows people to efficiently select the news that interests them. Reading habit is an art

of learning and knowing something, and it helps build vocabulary and background knowledge [8].

Indian online readers will grow very fast as per the latest research by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and IMRB International. Internet usage in India has gone up by 32% from October 2013 to October 2014. As per the research, 278 million people were using internet in India till October 2014 and 302 million more users are projected by December 2014. US-based research firm eMarketer says India would overtake the US as the second-largest market for smartphones in the world by 2016.

The importance of online media has grown rapidly over the last decade. Nowadays, leading newspapers of the world are moving to 100% digital page assembly and distribution, streamlining workflow processes while ensuring higher quality [9]. This research was conducted to examine the online readers' habits of information consumption. It will provide a better understanding of the nature of Indian readers and will show how they treat online news content. Finally, this research will help online content providers to improve their information as per the need of the target audience according to the readers' habits.

Review of Literature

People do a variety of things with the help of Internet. Many use internet for email and instant messaging to keep in touch with friends around the world. Some of them play games on the internet. There are those who depend on internet to get information through search engines. A report by Pew Research Center says, "People go to the Internet increasingly as a source of information. Nearly half of all Internet users go to the Internet at least once every week to get information and use websites of television networks, national

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newspapers, cable news networks, and magazines.”

Previous studies also suggest that Internet is used for information seeking [10-13]. When a person visits Internet for news, they often visit the sites of the traditional media, not Internet-only outlets [14]. Internet has become the extension of, rather than an alternative to, traditional news media (Ahlers) [15] which still dominate the online space [16].

As per a recent research, it is not only journalism that is changing with the growth in technology, but readers’ news consumption habits are also changing [17]. New technologies have transformed the nature of news reading, providing new opportunities for studying that behavior.

A study of print and web-based readers of The New York Times by Tewksbury and Althaus [18] found that online readers were less keen to read international, national, and political stories than their print counterparts. Online readers are more focused on topics of personal interest.

According to a previous research, content must be free unless it is very specialized, which once seemed to be the industry’s consensus [19]. Another study revealed that 71% of the users of a website would go somewhere else because there are so many free sites available. The paid subscription of online newspapers was as low as 0.2% to 2.6% of the print circulation [20]. As per the study only 2.5% users responded to paid content and most had no intent to pay in the future at the time of the study as free alternative news services exist.

Future of journalism is being made on Internet and online news will one day become mainstream journalism, according to Katz [21]. Online news are dynamic and interactive because of technologies such as hypertext, and attractive because of ample use of multimedia [22]. It provides the 24x7 up-to-date information about local and international events to online users.

Conaghan [23] cites the latest report of Comscore which says the digital audience of newspapers reached a new peak in August 2015, totaling 179.3 million adult unique visitors since August 2014. The digital audience grew more than twice as fast as the overall internet audience for age groups 18-24, 25-34 and 35-44. Half of the print readers are using mobile devices (smartphones or tablets).

This research attempts to investigate the online newspaper readers’ use of various features of internet media. This knowledge, hitherto not easy to come by, can contribute considerably to the improvement of online media. What kind of news online readers like the most? This is a central issue of this research.

Objective

Keeping in view the above discussion, the broader object of the study is to assess the habits of online news consumers. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. Do people have subscription of online newspapers?
2. Will people read online newspaper with paid subscription?
3. Do people write comments on news?
4. Do people share the news with friends or others?
5. Why people like online newspapers?
6. Sources of news for the online news consumers.
7. What kind of news online news consumers read?

Methodology

The online survey method was adopted to assess the habits of the readers in India. It is a most popular method to study Internet users. It is a systematic gathering of data from the audience by sending emails to them or posting questionnaires on social media and web pages. Respondents complete the questionnaire and mail it back.

Recent developments in the field of communication technology provide a wide choice of survey methods. Now with the help of internet one can conduct surveys through e-mail, Web-based tools and social media. Online surveys garner faster response and save time (Llieva, Baron, and Healey,) [24] and researchers can easily get data from distant locations [25-28].

Research has proved the advantage of online surveys. Most importantly, they provide access to groups and individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels [26,29].

In recent years, an increase in online surveys have presents scholars with new challenges in terms of applying traditional survey/research methods to the study of online behavior and Internet use [30-32]. Online surveys gave increased in the last 10 years. They cost less than other methods apart from number of other advantages over offline methods. They are not only more convenient for respondents, they also save the time of a researcher as the data is automatically stored electronically and analysis becomes easier.

For this study, a questionnaire was created on the Google Forms, a link of questionnaire posted on social media and mailed to various online news readers, I also provided a link to the questionnaire on my own web page for six month from July 1 to December 31, 2014. It posed only close-ended questions.

The questionnaire was checked by other experts, a senior journalist of The Tribune Publication and two teachers of Mass Communication, for validation and reliability. It was sent to 50 respondents to measure the reliability of questionnaire through the test-retest reliability method. The score of test-retest reliability was r^3 0.78.

The respondents for this survey were those who have the habit of reading news online and aged 15 years and above. The data was collected by a questionnaire using web survey and findings and conclusions have been drawn based on the survey results.

Data Analysis

Do people have subscription of online newspapers?

Of all respondents (N=3183), 62.6% have subscribed the online newspapers and 37.4% of all respondents don’t have subscription. Despite the free subscription by most of the news website the news consumer in India not very keen to subscribe a particular online media. Table 1 shows that men respondents are subscribing online newspapers more than women.

Will people read online newspaper with paid subscription?

As per the Table 2, majority online news readers (71%) says they will not read news on Internet after paying subscription only 29% are ready to pay for news subscription. Interestingly women respondents

News	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men (n=2064)	% of women (n=1119)
Yes	1993	62.6%	72.4%	53%
No	1190	37.4%	27.6%	47%

Table 1: Do people have subscription of online newspapers?

News	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men (n=2064)	% of women (n=1119)
Yes	2260	71%	72%	68%
No	923	29%	28%	32%

Table 2: Will people read online newspaper with paid subscription?

News	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men (n=2064)	% of women (n=1119)
Yes	2155	67.7%	63.2%	72.2%
No	1028	32.3%	36.8%	27.8%

Table 3: Do people write comments on news?

News	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men (n=2064)	% of women (n=1119)
Yes	1782	56%	56%	50.2%
No	1401	44%	44%	49.8%

Table 4: Do people share the news with friends or others?

News	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men (n=2064)	% of women (n=1119)
24x7 updates	1687	58%	52.2%	59.5%
In-depth news	356	11.2%	15%	9.2%
Easily available	1368	43%	39%	44.1%
Low costs	706	22.2%	26%	36%

Table 5: Why people like online newspapers?

wants to read after paying subscription more than male respondents, 32% and 28% respectively.

Do people write comments on news?

From the Table 3, it is inferred that 36.8% respondents have comment writing habit on all kind of news. Comments by the readers are the real time feedback from the readers. Women write comment on the news less than men.

Do people share the news with friends or others?

The Table 4 shows that more than half (56%) respondents share the news with friends on social media or email to them. Only 44% respondent says they are not sharing any news with friends or on social media. Females respondents indicated they share news with friends less than men. As men share 56% and women 50.2%.

Why people like online newspapers?

As per the Table 5 most of the respondents (58%) like the 24x7 news updates. While 43% like online newspaper due to its easily availability. As many as 22.2% like its low cost feature and 11.2% in depth news. The table shows that 59.5% women like 24x7 news updates and 52.2% men. As many as 44.1% women like easy availability of online news, 36% like low cost and 9.2% like in-depth news, while men likes 39%, 26% and 15% respectively.

Sources of news for the online news consumers

The Table 6 shows that traditional news media is dominating on the Internet. Majority of the respondents preferred The Times of India (43.5%), Hindustan Times (33%), The Tribune (28%), The Indian Express (25%), The Hindu (20%), other sources (28%) like New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Huffington Post and websites of news channels small news groups of India and Social Media (38%). As

per the gender division women respondents preferred The Times of India (49%), Hindustan Times (39.2%), Hindu (27.5%), The Tribune (27.6%), The Indian Express (21.5%), Social Media (34.4%), and other newspapers (26.7%). While man preferred the Times of India (43%), Hindustan Times (24%), Hindu (18%), The Tribune (30.5%), The Indian Express (27.6%), Social Media (41%), and other newspapers (29.3%).

What kind of news online news consumers read?

The Table 7 indicates the news content reading habits of online news readers in India. Most of the respondents (54.7%) prefer to read the all kind of news followed by Politics (25%), Entertainment (23.6%), Sports News (23%), Crime (20%), Education (17.6%), and Business (17%). Men have slightly stronger interest in political, sports, crime, business, and defence, news than women that is 24%, 21%, 19%, 17%, 14%, and 21%, 18%, 16.5%, 14%, 9% respectively. Whereas women are far ahead of men readers for reading news of entertainment, development, health, education, and features, 38%, 21%, 19%, 24.7%, 20%, and 17.3%,12%, 9.6%, 15.2%, and 10.7% respectively.

Discussion

The study shows more than half of the respondents (62.6%) subscribe to online news services, most of which provide news free of cost. A majority of respondents (71%) are not willing to get a paid subscription if a news outlet starts charging fees. Online publishers should exert caution when implementing the subscription model. If they try paid subscription for online news, they can lose many online readers that they have tried so hard to capture.

The research also uncovers some interesting facts about the Indian online news consumers. Nearly half of the respondents (54.7%) prefer to read all kinds of news. It is followed by politics, entertainment, sports, crime, and education. Men are more interested in politics, sports,

News Media	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men respondent (n=2064)	% of women respondent (n=1119)
TOI	1380	43.5%	43.3%	49%
Tribune	891	28%	30.5%	27.6%
HT	1050	33%	24%	39.2%
Exp	798	25%	27.6%	21.5%
Hindu	636	20%	18%	27.5%
Social Media	1209	41%	40.1%	36.4%
Others	892	28%	29.3%	26.7%

Table 6: Sources of news for the online news consumers.

Type of News	Respondent (n=3183)	% of respondent	% of men respondent (n=2064)	% of women respondent (n=1119)
Politics	796	25%	24%	21%
Sports News	732	23%	21%	18%
Entertainment	751	23.6%	17.3%	38%
Development	452	14.2%	12%	21%
Crime	636	20%	19%	16.5%
Business	541	17%	17%	14%
Health	394	12.4%	9.6%	19%
Education	560	17.6%	15.2%	24.7%
Defense	381	12%	14%	9%
Features	423	13.3%	10.7%	20%
All News	1741	54.7%	59%	53.7%

Table 7: What kind of news online news consumers read?

crime, business, and defence whereas women prefer entertainment, development, health, education, and general features.

A study by Pew Institute (2007) revealed that topics preferred by the news readers have not changed much in the past 20 years. According to the report, of all news categories studied – from political scandals to natural disasters – only the financial news category trended upward.

Internet news publishers are trying to generate revenue with various models such as the subscription model, the advertising model, the transactional model, and the bundled model. In India, paid online subscription is almost non-existent. The study revealed that a majority of online news readers (71%) would not read news if they have to pay for it, so only 29% are willing to pay for online news.

Online news differs from traditional newspaper on account of interactive communication and Meta information. As per the survey, more than half of the respondents (56%) share the news with their friends and others. One can share online news just by sending a link to friend. In case of a newspaper, it is a tough task to share news as it requires scanning or photocopy.

Online media provides the option of writing instant feedback by way of reader comments. Readers can express what they consider important about the news and openly comment on its quality. Though Indian readers still use traditional media, they also like to read the online version. The research shows that a majority of the respondents preferred The Times of India (43.5%), 33% Hindustan Times, 28% The Tribune, 25% The Indian Express, 20% The Hindu, and 28% other sources such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and Huffington Post. 41% respondents say they read news from social media.

Most of the Internet users like to know the local as well as global happenings. Most of the respondents (58%) like online media for the 24x7 news updates, followed by easy availability (43%), low cost (22.2%) and in depth news (11.2%).

Conclusion

The Narendra Modi led Indian government is taking a number of measures, most significantly Digital India, to provide internet access to the masses. “Digital India is our dream for the nation. When I say digital India, it is not meant for the rich but for those who are poor,” he says. Now Internet has reached most of the rural areas of India and day by day the speed is improving. With millions of news users, online news in India has become an important medium.

With more and more people getting connected to online outlets because of the minute-to-minute coverage, it has become a challenge for traditional media. As per this study, most of the Indian readers like to read latest news. They frequently keep checking the websites for the latest happenings around the world. Most of the internet users have accounts on various social media websites. An interesting aspect is that they don't wholly trust news available on the social media. To check the reliability of news from an alternative online source, readers either use Google or go to the traditional media's online editions.

As per the findings of this research, most of the online readers expect continuous updates. They expect online news outlets to provide 24-hour updates of all kinds of news. To attract more online news readers, traditional media should publish maximum news from different part of the world. As a lot of readers get news and information from the social media, websites of traditional media can excerpt the content available on social media along with their links. The study reveals that

the majority of Indian readers are not interested in paid subscription. As paid subscription is a chief source of revenues for online media. it is a big challenge for Indian online media. They may have to rely mostly on direct advertisements or Google Ad Sense. But to generate revenues mainly with advertisements, online media requires a high number of readers. To maintain and increase the number of readers, a key strategy can be to motivate people to subscribe to news updates on their mobile and mail. The online media segment in India is still largely unexplored as only 50% respondents subscribe to online news despite mostly free subscription.

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