



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 24X7 news updates. *The Times of India* is the most readable (43.5%) online news source among the respondents followed by Social Media (38%).

Keywords : *Online news, online media, online news consumer, social media, reading habits.*

Introduction

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 (Sasseen, Olmstead, & Mitchell, 2013).

The Chicago Tribune was the pioneer in publishing online newspaper after publishing its content in 1992 (Deuze, 1999). After 1992, the growth of online media is significantly grown. The World Wide Web has considerably influenced the journalism. The Internet has attracted the many people around the world and has entered into people's daily lives.

The Internet has become major source of communication in the present world and reading news is the top fourth popular internet activity among the respondents in USA (Cole, et al.2000). As per the various scholars use of

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internet and computer-mediated communication is increasing (Fox, Rainie, Larsen, Horrigan, Lenhart, Spooner, & Carter, 2001; Horrigan, 2001; Nie & Erbring, 2000; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002).

Now communication system is changing rapidly day by day, it is now much easier to access information available on the Internet. The hyperlink on the news sites gives extraordinary control over the news consumption process. The online news have become the inherent part of modern society, it posed a challenge to the print media in some part of the world.

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 report, 278 million people are using the internet in India till October 2014 and IMAAI is expecting 302 million people to use it by December 2014 in India. US-based research firm eMarketer (2014) says, India will overtake the US as the second largest market for Smartphone in the world by 2016.

Reading habit is an art of learning and knowing something, it helps to build vocabulary and background knowledge (Strommen & Mates, 2004). New technologies are changing the nature of news reading habits, the interactive nature of the Internet allows people to efficiently select the news that interests them.

Internet has become an important source of an information and provides knowledge of different segments of the society. All the major newspapers of India have started their e-papers and online newspapers. Many Indians have started reading online newspapers. Experts of new communication technologies explained that the new media will remove barriers between audiences and information (Abramson, Arterton, & Orren, 1988).

The importance of the online media industry has grown rapidly over the last decade. Nowadays leading newspapers of the world are moving to 100 percent digital page assembly and distribution, streamlining workflow processes while ensuring higher quality (Veglis, 2005).

"Future of journalism is found on the Internet and that online news will one day become mainstream journalism" Jon Katz (1999). Online news are dynamic, interactivity, hypertext, and attractive by using multimedia (Opgenhaffen, 2011); it provides the 24 hours up-to-date information about local and international events to online users.

This research was conducted to examine the online readers habits for information consumption. It will provide a better understanding of nature of Indian readers and will convey that 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 variety of things with the help of Internet, many people use Internet for email, chatting to keep in touch with friends and others around the world. Some of them play games on the Internet; others use Internet to get information through search engines. Pew Research Center (1999) 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 newspapers, cable news networks, and magazines ". Previous studies also suggest that Internet is used for information seeking (Mings, 1997; Stempel, Hargrove, & Bernt, 2000; Ferguson & Perse; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000;

Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). When any person visit to the Internet for news, they often visit the sites of the traditional media, not Internet-only outlets (Cyberatlas, 1999). Internet has becomes the extension, rather than revolution, of traditional news media (Ahlers,2006) and traditional news media is dominating on the Internet (Tewksbury,2003).

As per the recent research not only journalism is changing with the growth in technology, but also readers' news consumption habits are changing (Lin, Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2005). New technologies are changing the nature of news reading and providing new opportunities for studying that behavior (Tewksbury,2003). A study of print and web-based readers of The New York Times by the Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) found that online readers are less keen to read international, national, and political stories than their print counterparts. Online readers are more focused on topics of personal interest.

As per the previous research “content must be free unless it is very specialized,” which once seemed to be the industry’s consensus (Carlson, 2003). Another study revealed that 71% of news site users 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 (Borrell & Associates, 2001). As per the study by Hsiang Iris Chyi (2005) 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.

This research attempts to investigate the online newspaper readers' habit of using various features of online media. The gap is a considerable issue for the betterment of the online media. What kind of news online readers like the most? This is the main purpose of this research.

Objective

Keeping in view the above discussion, the broader objects of the study was to assess the habits of online news consumers. The specific objectives of the study were 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 online news consumer read the most on Internet?

Methodology

The online survey method was adopted to know the online readers habit in North India. It is a most popular method to study the Internet users. It is a systematic gathering of data from the audience by sending email to Internet users or posting questionnaire on social media and web pages. Respondents complete the questionnaire over the World Wide Web.

Recent developments in the field of communication technologies have given choice of survey methods. Now with the help of internet on can do survey through e-mail, Web-based tools and Social media. Online survey

have faster responses and save the time (Llieva, Baron, & Healey, 2002), researcher can get data from a distant locations (Bachmann & Elfrink, 1996; Garton et al., 2003; Taylor, 2000; Yun & Trumbo, 2000).

Some of the research proved the advantage of online survey research as per the studies, it takes advantage of the ability of the Internet to provide access to groups and individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1999; Wellman, 1997).

In recent years an increase of online surveys have noticed for online studies, presenting scholars with new challenges in terms of applying traditional survey research methods to the study of online behavior and Internet use (Andrews, Nonnecke, & Preece, 2003; Bachmann & Elfrink, 1996; Stanton, 1998; Witmer, Colman, & Katzman, 1999; Yun & Trumbo, 2000).

Online surveys are increasing in the last 10 years , conducting web or online surveys in comparison with other methods is low cost (Bachmann & Elfrink, 1996; Couper, 2000; Llieva et al., 2002; Yun & Trumbo, 2000). Web surveys have a number of advantages over other survey methods. They are convenient for respondents to take on their own time and save the time of a researcher as it is automatically stored electronically and analysis becomes easier.

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

Questionnaire was checked by the other experts one senior journalist of The Tribune Publication and two teachers of Mass Communication for the validation and reliability of questionnaire. After that the survey questionnaire was sent to 50 respondents to measure the reliability of questionnaire through the test-retest reliability method. The score of test-retest reliability was $r \geq 0.78$.

The respondent for this survey were those who have the habit of reading news online and are of age groups between 15 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

Table 1: Do people have subscription of online newspapers?

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%

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 number 1 shows that men respondents are subscribing online newspapers more than women.

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

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

As per the table number 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 wants to read after paying subscription more than male respondents, 32% and 28% respectively.

Table 3: Do people write comments on news?

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

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 writes comment on the news less than men.

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

	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%

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%.

Table 5: Why people like online newspapers?

	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%

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 it's 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.

Table 6: Sources of news for the online news consumer

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	38%	39.1%	34.4%
Others	600	18.8%	21.3%	19.7%

The table number 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 (18.8%) 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 (19.7%). While man preferred *The Times of India* (43%), *Hindustan Times* (24%), *Hindu* (18%), *The Tribune* (30.5%), *The Indian Express* (27.6%), Social Media (39.1%), and other newspapers (21.3%).

Table 7: What online news consumer read the most on Internet?

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%

The table number 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%) have subscribed online news services. Despite most of them are providing free of cost subscription, the subscription rates are not good. Majority (71%) respondents are not willing to pay subscription if they start charging subscription fees. Online publishers should exert caution when implementing the subscription model. If they will try implementing the paid subscription for online news, they can lose many online news readers that they have tried so hard to build.

The research also uncovered some interesting facts about the Indian online news consumers. An examination of news content reading online shows, most of the respondents (54.7%) prefer to read all kind of news. It is followed by politics, entertainment, sports, crime, and education. Men are more interested in political, sports, crime, business, and defence, news, whereas women are far ahead of men in reading news concerning entertainment, development, health, education, and 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 money news category trended upward.

Internet news publishers are trying to generate revenue with various models : the subscription model, the advertising model, the transactional model, and the bundled model. As per this study, majority of online news readers (71%) says they will not read news on Internet after paying subscription and 29% are ready to pay for news subscription.

Online news differ from traditional newspaper as they have feature for interactive communication and meta information with news. As per the survey, more than half of the respondents (56%) share the news with their friends and others. One can share an online news just by sending a link to friend. In the newspapers it is a tough task to share a news with friends, as it requires scanning or photocopy and than deliver the scanned news.

Online media provides the option of writing instant feedback, by writing comments on all news. A reader can give his/her view of what they consider important about the news and whether the news is correct or fictitious. People of India still using traditional media and they prefer to read their online version. Online consumers like to read the traditional media on Internet. The research showed that 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 (18.8%) and only 38% respondents says they read news from social media.

Most of the Internet users are addicted to know the happenings around the world. To know an important activity, they are using apps to get the latest news on their smartphone. Online media have many features, which

makes it popular around the world. Most of the respondents (58%) like the 24X7 news updates at online media, followed by easy availability (43%), low cost (22.2%) and in depth news (11.2%).

Conclusion

Internet has become an important news medium serving millions of news users worldwide. The way people are reading news online, it is changing their reading habits. Online newspapers should focus on 24hour news services as most of the online readers expect continuous updates. Most of the readers like to read all kinds of news. To attract the online news readers, traditional media should publish maximum news from the different part on their online edition. Majority of Indian readers are not interested in paid subscription. It is a big challenge for Indian online media, as paid subscription is one of the revenue generation method for online media. They should motivate the people to subscribe the news, as despite the free subscription by most of the media, only 62.6% have subscribed the online media. Newspapers should use their news links with all the social media website. One third online readers just read news on the social media.

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