

“Traditional Print Media or Fast-Paced Digital Media: Understanding the News-Consumption Preferences of Delhi students”

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, news dissemination has become fast-paced, available on the palm of one's hand, with constant notifications on the phone. Fuelled by instant messaging apps, algorithmic social media feeds, and constant 24-hour broadcast journalism, there's been a sea-change in the way news is consumed. Yet, despite the constant digital push, print media has managed to retain its position as an institution with verified news and detailed analysis of topics. However, the hyper-saturation of news portals, apps, podcasts, streaming networks, have eroded the market hegemony of print media. To secure future viability and effectively engage youngsters, the print industry must actively pivot. While digital platforms, including news portals and news channels, excel in real-time, fragmented reporting, print media's strength lies in providing comprehensive contextual framing, analytical depth, and interpretive clarity to any article. Print media can provide the meaning, context and a better understanding of any event or issue as compared to other media. That is the strength of print media, which can be utilized in the future too. By making structural changes, it can regain its position as a trusted source of daily news.

KEYWORDS

Print media, youngsters, digital media, readers, newspapers, podcasts, news channels, apps

INTRODUCTION

At present, there are over 62,000 newspapers and periodicals published in India, over 300 radio stations in English, Hindi and other regional languages, over a dozen news channels, 740 million⁽¹⁾ mobile phones and over 560 million⁽²⁾ internet connections. With a fast-growing nation, wherein almost everyone has a smartphone equipped with pocket-friendly data plans and an active young generation, the pertinent question is, will the traditional printed newspaper be able to survive in the contemporary digital world? Youngsters these days are used to consuming news in the form of WhatsApp alerts, instant notifications by news portals and apps, and there's also the option of browsing the internet and watching the news channels. Most of the media houses have branched out to serve to the younger generation by creating YouTube channels of their news outlets, so that even if their particular apps are not exclusively downloaded, their content reaches the masses through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and even LinkedIn

However, despite these threats that are looming large on newspapers, the fact remains that it is an institution. Print media provides the kind of optical satisfaction that other media find hard to match. The fast-paced busy user interface of news portals, apps and channels make it difficult for any topic to register and stay long in people's memory. Print media has to build on its strength and discover new areas of influence and revenue generation. Print media can

provide the meaning and context – in short, a better analysis of any event or issue, in the most detailed manner and all in one place than other media. That is the strength of print media, which can be utilized in the future too. Due to the advent of social media and smartphones, traditional printed newspapers have taken a hit. While digital media has cashed in on the trend, print media needs to assert its strength of analytical articles, unbiased reporting and dispensing verified news to its readers.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This research is being done to study various factors related to print media and the rise of digital media. The study is being done for the following objectives:

- To get a clear picture about where print media stands
- To understand the threats being faced by the traditional form of media in this world of internet and satellite television
- The methods that need to be adopted by print media in order to survive and not lose its position
- To shed light on the most popular features of print media among youngsters
- To study the reasons for the transition from print to the digital age

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design: Descriptive research design

Method of study: Random sample survey

The survey method was adopted considering the nature of the respondents, who are either studying or have just finished their college. A total of 52 youngsters belonging to the age group of 18 to 25 studying in Delhi were approached for giving their opinion of the status of print media.

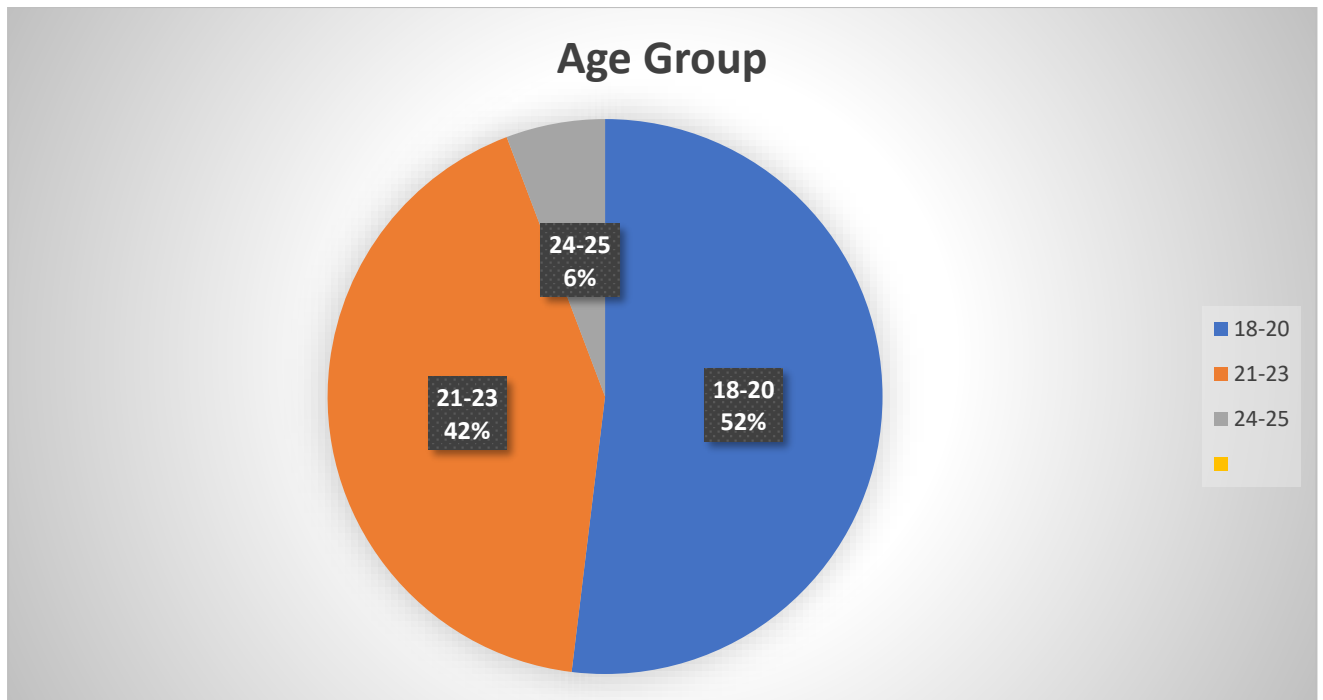
RESEARCH TOOLS

A structure questionnaire

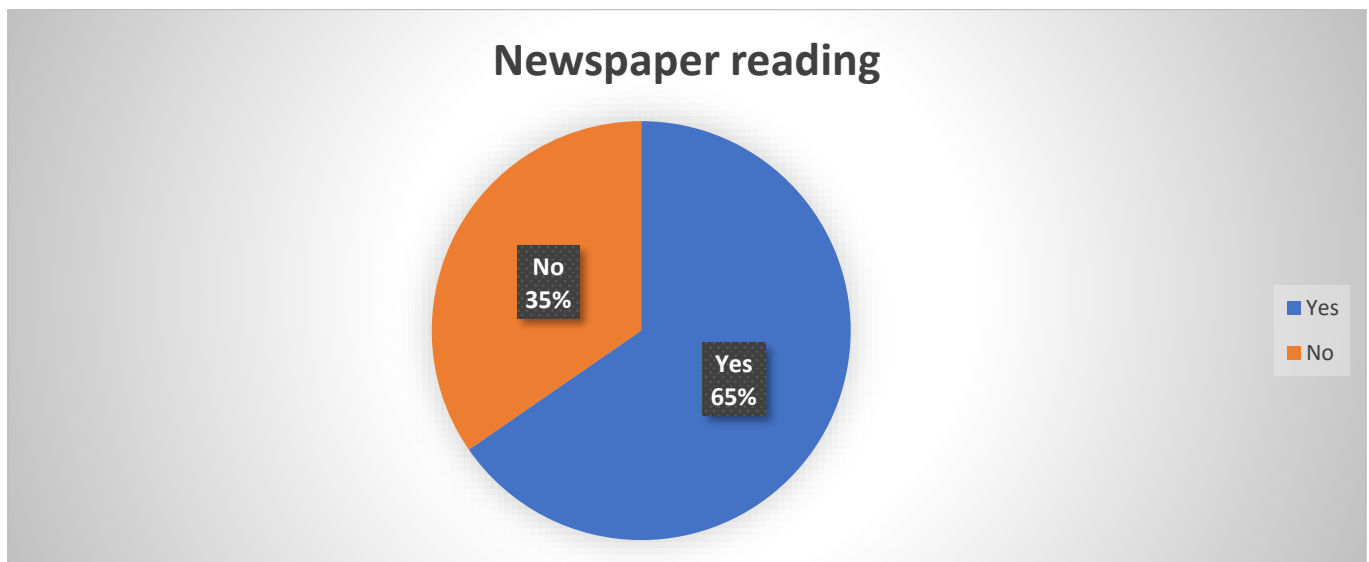
A structured questionnaire was developed for the research. The questions were framed keeping in mind the nature of the survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

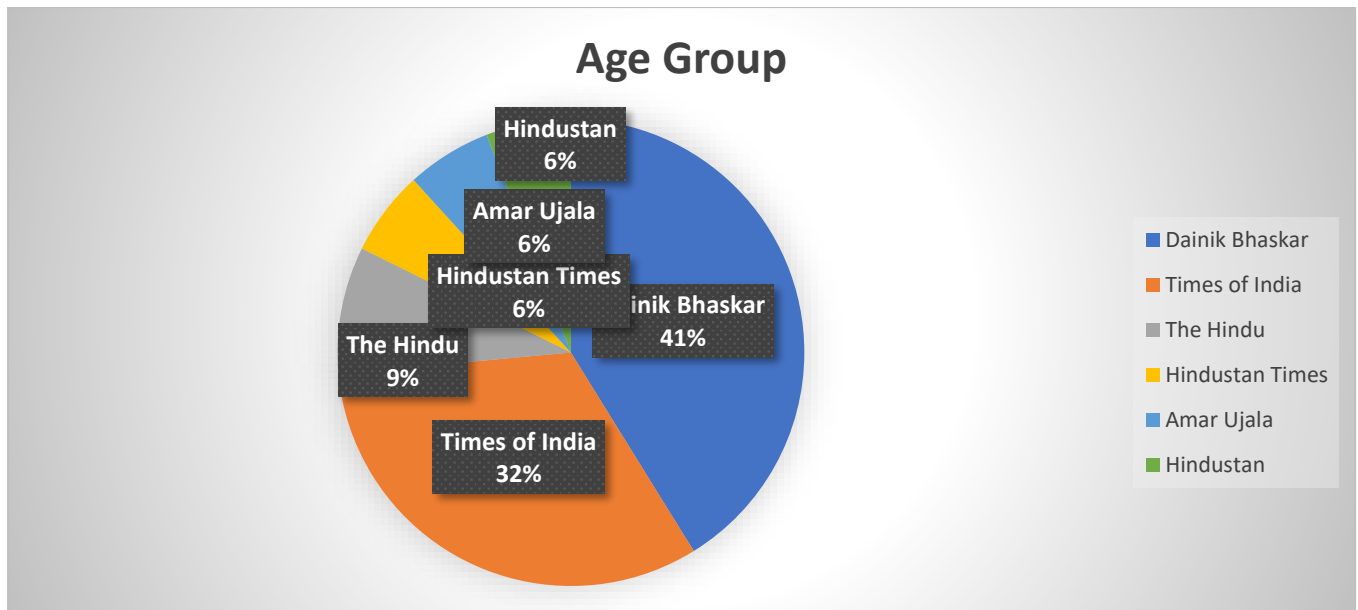
1. Age groups of students interviewed: College-going youngsters living or studying in Delhi were approached with the questionnaire. They were aged between 18 and 25 years, most of whom were still studying or were awaiting results. The age was an important factor here because once people complete their education, they tend to get busy with work and might or might not pick up a newspaper to read. It is only during the college time, when several students are preparing for entrance tests and competitive exams, that they religiously follow news in almost all forms.



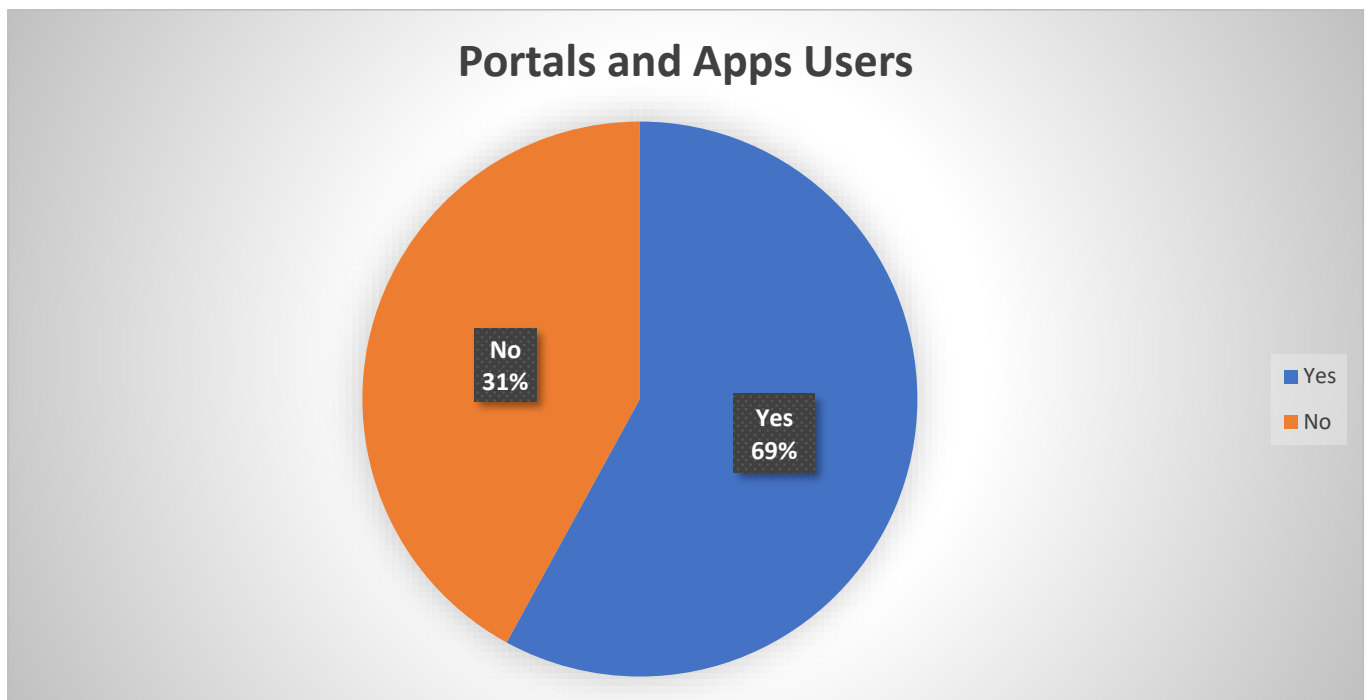
2. Reading the hardcopy of the newspaper: While many readers may have shifted to the online medium for their daily dose of news, there are many who still prefer reading the physical paper. And as it turns out, youngsters too read the paper instead of its digital counterpart, as is evident in this graph below:



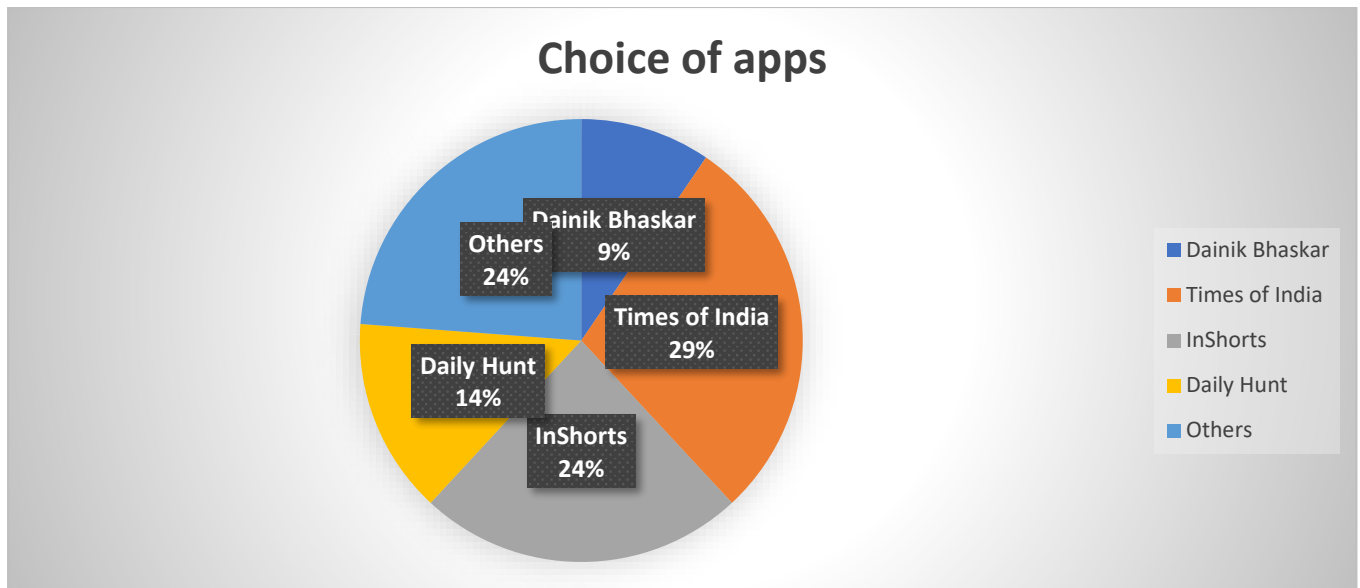
3. Choice of newspapers: Those who read newspapers preferred national Hindi and English dailies respectively, Dainik Bhaskar and The Times of India, the most. Other newspapers included The Hindu, Hindustan Times, Amar Ujala and Hindustan.



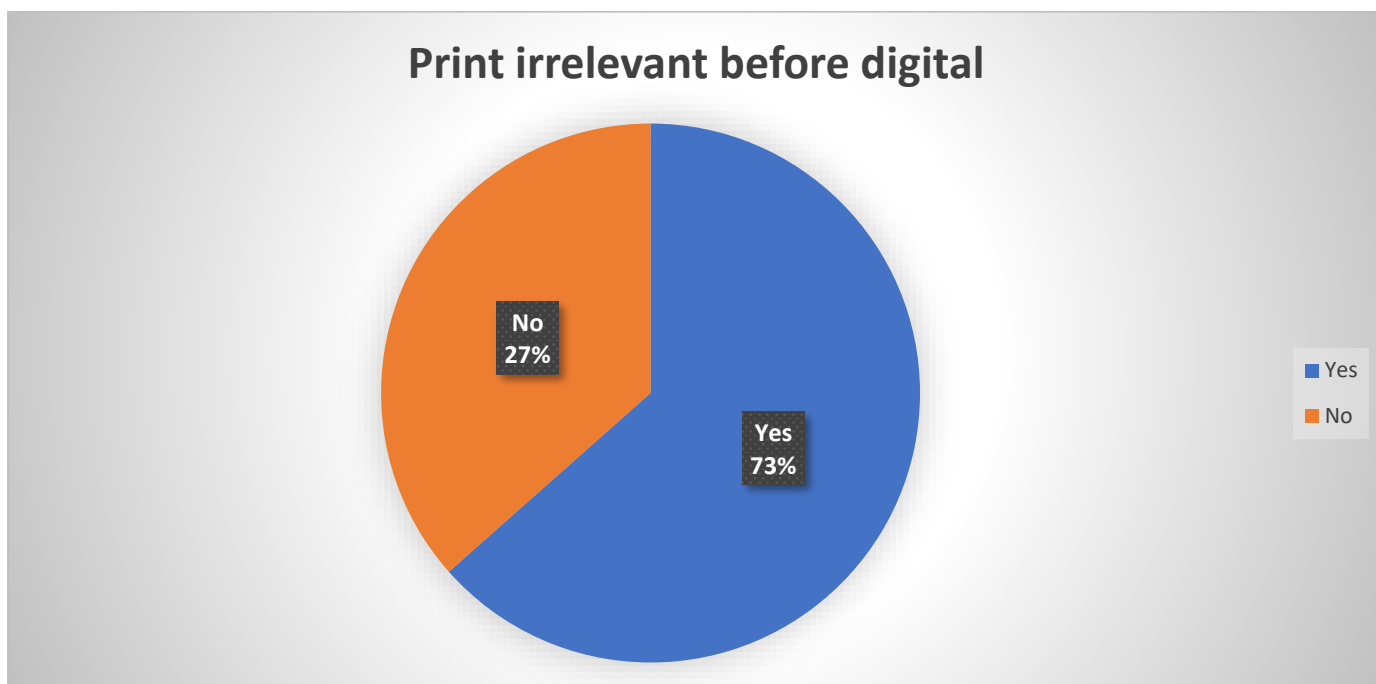
4. News Portals via Apps on the phone: On being asked if the students subscribed to news portals via apps on the phone, majority of them said yes. The most popular ones were of the newspaper giants in the country.



5. Choice of portals and apps: Those who answered in the affirmative said that the most popular apps were of the most trusted brands that have been around for a long time. Here's a graphical representation of the responses.

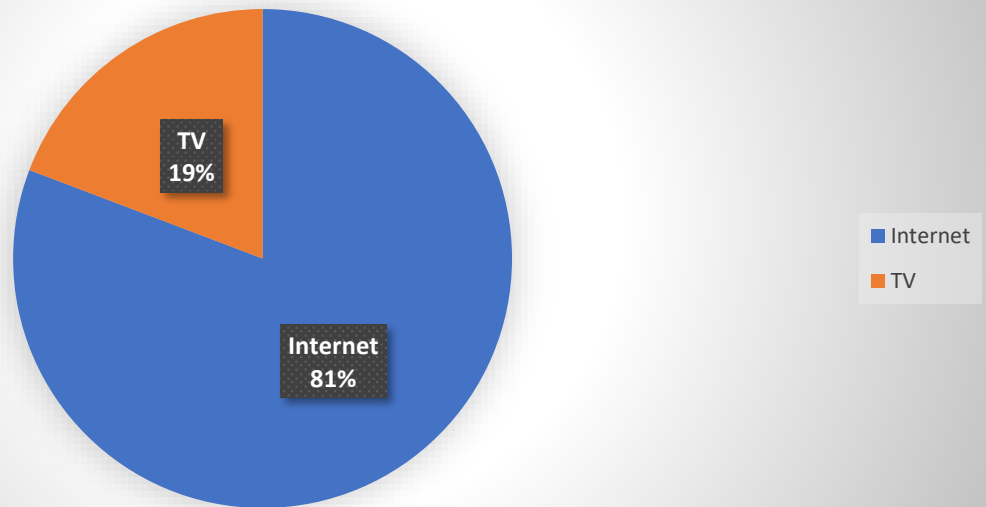


6. Redundancy of newspapers in the digital era: While majority of respondents said that they read newspapers, they do agree that newspaper is not as relevant as it used to be a decade ago. The digital world has become a dominant force in disseminating news and information.



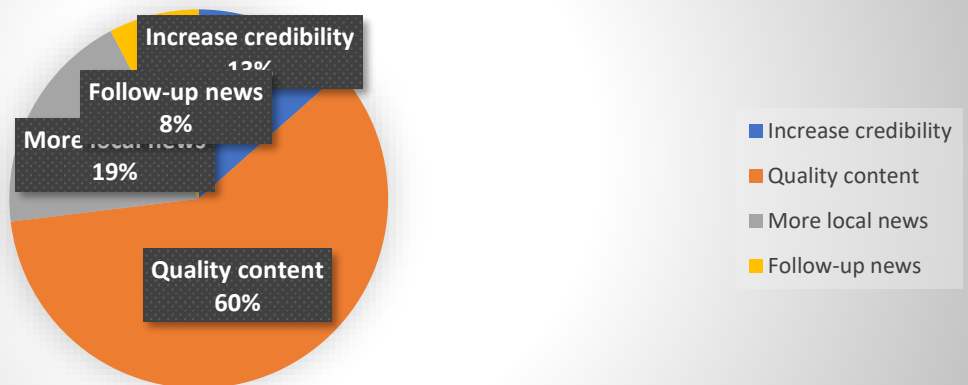
7. Most challenging for print media: Most of the respondents were of the opinion that print media faced maximum challenge from TV and Internet.

Print media's competition

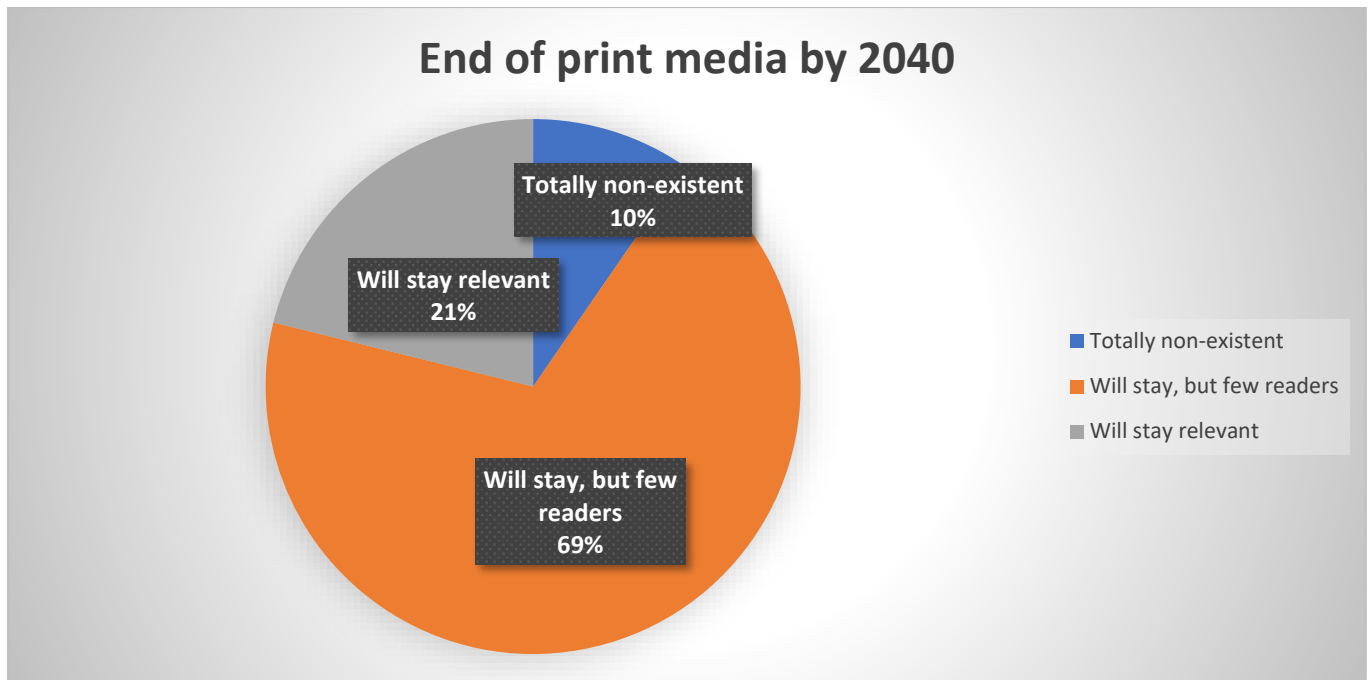


8. Steps to maintain popularity of print media: The respondents gave mixed opinions about the ways of maintaining the popularity of print media. But a huge chunk of the respondents believed that focusing on the quality of their content will make a huge difference in retaining the popularity of a newspaper.

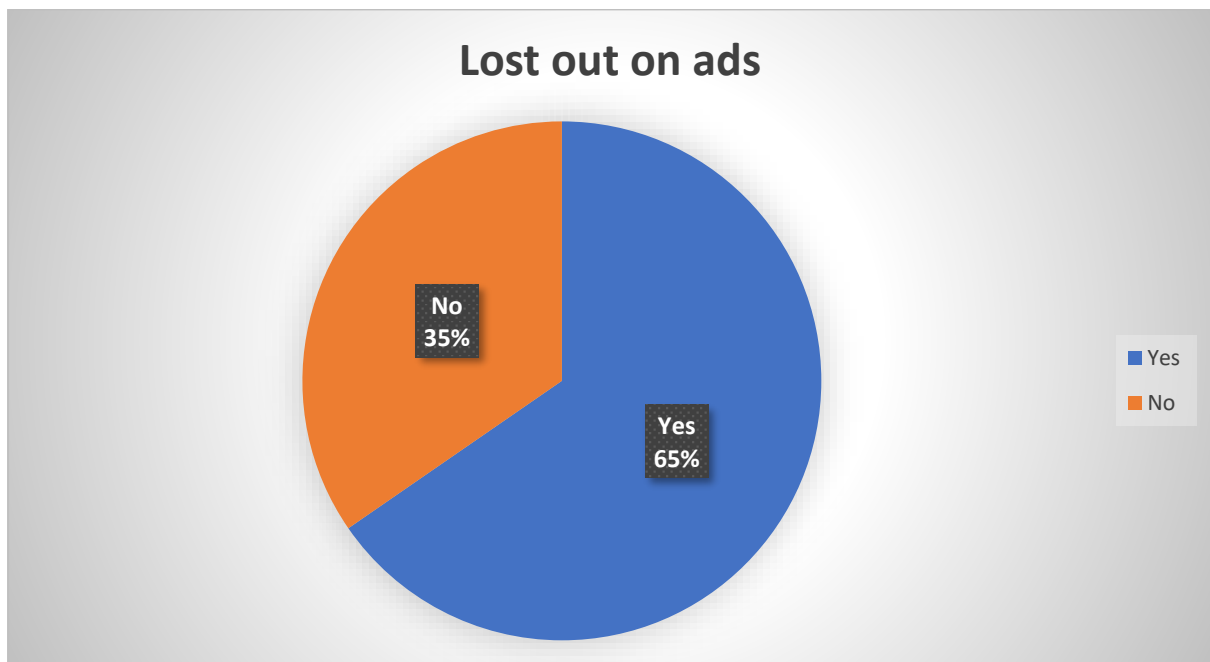
Sales



9. End of print media in 2040: While a survey says that print media will not exist in western countries by 2040, maximum respondents here say that it cannot happen in India. The older generation, especially, still subscribes to newspapers and prefer consuming news in the traditional manner.

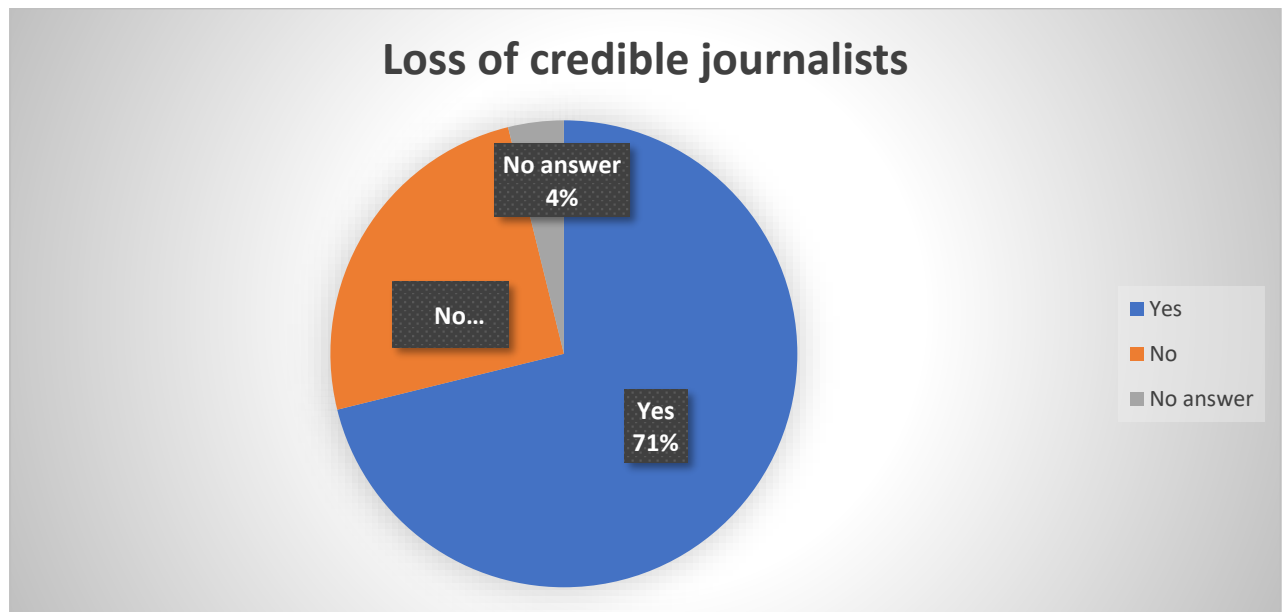


10. Decrease in the number of advertisements: Most respondents feel that because of other mediums, print media has lost out on advertisements. The revenue of print media has decreased because advertisers from across all streams consider that spending money on print ads is not commercially viable as people don't pick up the newspaper even for a quick glance.



11. Loss of good journalists: Most of the respondents feel that because of other mediums of communication, print media is losing out on good and credible journalists. This is also related to the fact that remuneration is directly proportional to the revenue generated by print media.

Since a lot of newspapers are going out of business, they are unable to give a decent annual salary hike to journalists, forcing manpower to look for better alternatives in digital media.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Despite the diminishing popularity of newspapers, it was seen that majority of the students surveyed read at least one paper. 65% of the respondents said they read the physical paper as opposed to 35% who said they didn't. Since the newspaper carries hard news, political, crime and economic news, soft news, features, interviews and reader-utility articles, they offer a total package which could appeal to youngsters. Since college students are aiming to make a career in different fields and are studying for competitive exams, a newspaper comes in handy for them.
- Since Delhi is a Hindi-speaking belt, it's no surprise that they read a Hindi daily like Dainik Bhaskar (41% of the respondents) the most. The Times of India is the most widely read English daily in the world and Delhi is no exception with 32% of the youngsters naming it. The Hindu (9%) is the most preferred newspaper among people preparing for competitive exams.
- Quality content and local stories are what appeal to youngsters the most. Most youngsters feel that newspapers need to deliver quality content in order to stay in the game. Credibility of news is what makes newspapers the most trusted source of information. So, 13% youngsters say that they wish there was an increased credibility in newspapers. Local news is another factor that students want in the newspaper, which they think will help in keeping newspapers popular. The local stories feature topics that concern the city and its youngsters. They are either a style trend, or a hot topic of discussion in colleges or the local elections, or a new event happening in the city, or others such related topics.
- Majority of those surveyed were of the opinion that the paper had a stickability factor due to its quality content, and this was the reason they read the paper. Anything that doesn't pique the reader's interest is bound to dip in the popularity charts. This is the reason good quality content is required to keep the readers' interest alive.

- With the advent of television way back in the late 1980s, it was said that newspapers will cease to exist. However, that didn't happen despite news channels blaring 24/7 in our living rooms. Now, with the internet and cheap data plans, everyone has access to the world wide web. News portals and apps are benefitting the most from this, which is why 81% of the respondents feel that internet posed the maximum challenge to print media.
- While a survey says that print media will not exist in western countries by 2040, maximum respondents here say that it cannot happen in India. A total of 69 per cent respondents were of the opinion that print media will stay, but with a reduced number of readers, while 21 per cent people said that it will stay relevant even in 2040. Only 10% respondents felt that it will be totally non-existent by then. It's evident with the results that newspapers still command respect and position among readers.
- A newspaper's major chunk of revenue comes in the form of advertisement. However, internet has given every small, medium, large company or brand a cheaper medium to advertise their business. Social media has made it possible for individual business owners to directly reach out to their customers. This has been a big blow for newspapers and the ad revenue they have enjoyed over the years. 65 per cent of the respondents felt that because of other mediums, print media has lost out on ads.
- The same has also impacted journalists as most of the respondents (71 per cent) feel that because of other mediums of communication, print media is losing out on good and credible journalists.

CONCLUSION

One of the positive developments of the present era is that newspapers are now available online in the form of e-papers. This enables many to read the entire newspaper on their phones while commuting, or when in their college, after their classes, at home, and essentially anywhere. Many students, during the course of this study, said that they also have apps on their phone for their daily dose of news. Most e-versions used to be free of cost, but after the Covid_19 pandemic, newspapers resorted to a subscription fee to maintain their ad revenue and keep a tab of readers of their e-paper. Delhi is a city that plays host to students from all over the country. There are many students who come from the southern parts of India and many others from northeast who are here to study. Interviewing them gave a mini insight into the current spirit of the country, when it comes to print media. Newspapers play a very important role in shaping the opinion of people, and therefore, its reliability is paramount. They are vital to the lives of college students, too, who, in the future, will take on important positions professionally. So, reliability and credibility of news are important factors for it to be popular. Students read only those newspapers where they are sure that the news they are reading is authentic and verified. This also determines a particular newspaper's popularity with the students. A lot of students depend on newspapers for their daily dose of information and general knowledge.

A general sentiment is that education and career-related news are most useful for students. Newspapers can take this into consideration and focus on research-based articles, communication, technology and science-related articles, which will be helpful in their studies. It's safe to say that reliability of news plays a very important part in students' lives. With streams ranging from science to mathematics to political science to psychology to economics to various other subjects, college students are making their presence felt in every stream. They are not considered ignorant and self-obsessed. They are aware of the goings-on in the nation

and are part of the revolutionary changes happening in our society. This change and evolution are also seen in their reading preferences.

With an increasing number of boys and girls choosing careers beyond the traditional fields like engineers and doctors, their choice of subjects in college also vary a great deal. Therefore, it is interesting to note that they form a big section of newspaper readers. Despite a large section of readers moving to online domains, students who are preparing for their competitive exams or those who have chosen fields like media, prefer the print version and subscribe to newspapers or their e-paper or app. Sports, economy, science, gadgets, fashion, lifestyle, national and international – college-goers are interested in all sorts of news. This is corroborated by the fact that newspapers and magazines offer youth-oriented supplements to cater to these young readers. For example: Dainik Bhaskar has City Bhaskar that contains college news, The Times of India's feature pull-out Delhi Times specially targets young readers, Hindustan Times has a youth-centric supplementary called HT City and Brunch that regularly features college activities and college news.

If newspapers want to thrive in this present era of internet, newspapers will have to be made available to all college students. All colleges can have newspapers in their common area, reception, hostel and also classrooms. This will urge them to pick the newspaper up and read it. E-papers were available free of cost or had a negligible monthly fee, but after the pandemic, when people became wary of bringing the physical paper inside their homes for the fear of spreading infection, the cost of subscription also shot up. This will naturally dissuade a college student, who doesn't have any means of income, from reading a newspaper. They should have a student login, which is completely free of cost and without any restrictions to encourage more students to read newspapers. This will enable students to go through the archives of the newspapers to make notes, and download and save a particular news article or page for their future reference. Establish a gender-neutral environment for reading. It's high time that we moved from pre-conceived notions about the reading preference of boys and girls, basis their gender. Students across all streams, irrespective of their gender, like to read.

Seminars should be conducted in order to sensitise students towards the importance of reading. It will make students aware of the benefits of reading and how reading newspapers can help them in forming opinion and make an informed choice. Seminars will also bring together students who share similar likes and dislikes about a topic or genre in terms of books or reading. Inter-college seminars will help bring together students in large numbers and motivate them to keep reading.

Finally, while things are moving at a very rapid speed in this contemporary world, it is also a fact that we cannot leave our traditions behind. Same is the case with newspapers. With this survey it was found that youngsters still prefer reading the paper and believe in the conventional method of imparting news, which is through print media. Experts believe that despite the audience being divided, there are still newspaper lovers in India. In the US and UK, where most part of the population leaves early for work and therefore, doesn't get the time to carry newspapers. But in India, people can still be seen carrying newspapers along with them to work. One can see people reading newspapers in buses, trains, metros, autos and any other mode of travel. Respondents in the survey have also validated the fact that despite other mediums becoming popular, print media has not lost its charm altogether. It just has to redefine itself and rethink the choices of its target audience.

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