

UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL NEWS CONSUMPTION: A STUDY OF READERS' PERCEPTION AND PREFERENCE

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Abstract

The study aims at exploring the readers' perception and preference for online newspaper. Data for the study have been collected through issue of questionnaire to 153 online newspaper readers by adopting convenience sampling method. Simple Percentage and Chi-Square test have been used to analyze the data. The result of the study reveals that majority of the readers prefer online newspaper as it is easy to access, environmentally friendly, variety of topics, user friendly, availability of free content, easy to navigate, anytime anywhere access, real time update, convenience and cost effective. Chi-Square test reveals that variables namely age, type of family, educational qualification, occupation, monthly income, family income, sources of information, device used to read and period of usage are found to be significant with the level of preference for online newspaper.

Keywords:

Online-Newspaper-Preference-Readers

Introduction

An online newspaper is a digital platform that delivers news and information through the internet, replacing the traditional print medium. It offers real-time updates on current events, multimedia content like videos and images, and interactive features such as comments and social media sharing. Online newspapers cater to a global audience, providing instant access to information from anywhere in the world. They have revolutionized the way people consume news, making it more accessible, engaging, and customizable to individual preferences. The advantages of online newspapers are numerous. They are environmentally friendly, eliminating the need for paper and printing. Readers can access a vast array of news sources at no cost or through affordable subscriptions. Additionally, the ability to update content instantly ensures that readers stay informed with the latest developments. Interactive elements enhance user engagement, and the availability of archives allows readers to explore past articles with ease. However, online newspapers also face challenges. The rise of fake news and misinformation has raised concerns about credibility and trust. Over-reliance on advertisements for revenue can lead to intrusive ads and affect the reading experience. Furthermore, the shift from print to digital has impacted traditional journalism jobs and raised questions about the sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age. Despite these challenges, online newspapers continue to evolve, balancing innovation with credibility to meet the needs of modern readers.

Review of Literature

Ahmed (2018), in his study made an attempt to know the perception of online news among university students. Data were collected from 150 university students by issuing questionnaire. Convenience sampling method has been adopted to select the sample. The findings showed that students found online newspapers are informative, engaging and have hyperlink features. **Maya Rao (2021)**, has made a research to examine the perception and preference of online newspaper readers. The data have been collected from 88 readers by issuing questionnaire. Analysis revealed that the majority of readers aged between 18 and 27 preferred online newspapers for their availability across devices, affordability, and instant notifications. **Pooja Singh (2022)**, made a study to determine the perception and usage patterns of online newspapers among young adults. Data for the study have been collected from 85 readers by issuing questionnaire. Simple percentage and Chi-Square test have been used to analyze the data. The result of the study indicates that young adults aged between 18 and 24

preferred online newspapers mainly for their portability, timely updates, and environmental benefits compared to print media. **Sunil Kumar (2023)**, has made an attempt to know the factors affecting reader's preference for Online Newspapers. Data for the study have been collected by issuing questionnaire to 90 readers by adopting purposive sampling. Simple percentage and Chi-Square test indicated that majority of readers between 20-28 years preferred online newspapers for cost-effectiveness, availability of multimedia and interactive content.

Statement of the Problem

The adoption of online newspapers has surged as readers increasingly seek convenient, real-time access to news and information in the digital era. Despite their growing popularity, online newspapers face challenges in understanding and addressing the factors that drive reader preferences. Publishers and stakeholders must identify these key reasons to enhance the user experience and maintain competitiveness in a rapidly evolving media landscape. The core issue lies in exploring the variables that influence readers' choices, such as ease of access, affordability, multimedia integration, and the ability to personalize content. While online newspapers are praised for their accessibility and environmental benefits, mixed feedback from users highlights concerns like information overload, intrusive advertisements, and issues of trustworthiness. In this context, critical questions arise: What is the socio-economic profile of readers of online newspaper? What are the key reasons behind the preference for online newspaper? and What are the factors that significantly influence the level of preference for online newspaper?

Objectives

To find out the solution for the questions raised above, the following objectives have been framed.

- To know the socio-economic profile of readers of online newspaper
- To identify the reasons for preferring online newspaper
- To ascertain the variables that influence the level of preference for online newspaper

Research Methodology

The study is based on primary data. The data have been collected from 153 respondents residing in Pollachi Taluk by using Google form. It contains questions relating to the socio-economic profile, types of newspaper and preference for online newspaper. Convenient sampling method has been adopted to select the sample. Simple Percentage, Friedman rank test and Chi-Square Test have been used to analyse the data.

Findings

The finding of the study are divided in to four sections namely, socio-economic profile, type of newspaper preferred, reasons for preferring online newspaper and variables influencing the level of preference for online newspaper

(i) Socio-Economic Profile

- Most 65(42.5%) of the respondents are residing in rural area.
- Most of the respondents, 59(38.6%) belong to the age group of 21-30 years.
- Majority 86(56.2%) of the respondents are male.
- Majority 94(61.4%) of respondents are unmarried.
- Most 56(36.6%) of the respondents are under graduates.
- Most 43(31.6%) of the respondents are students.
- Majority 79(51.6%) of the respondents belong to nuclear family.
- Most 70(45.8%) of the respondents have two earning members in the family.
- Most of the respondents 67(43.8%) have up to two non-earning members in their family.
- Majority of the respondents 78(51%) are members in the family.
- Most 57 (37.2%) of the respondents are using smartphone for reading online newspaper.
- Most 59(36.6%) of the respondents monthly income is up to Rs.20,000.

- Most 48(31.4%) of the respondents monthly family income is up to Rs.50,000.
- Most of the respondents, 45(29.4%) came to know about online newspapers through friends.
- Most of the respondents, 57(37.2%) use online newspapers for less than a year.
- Most of the respondents 46(30.1%) prefer text articles format for online newspapers.
- Majority of the respondents, 97(63.4%) prefer Tamil language

(ii) Type of Newspaper Preferred - Friedman Ranking

It is observed that the respondents ranked The Hindu newspaper as the first rank followed by Indian express, Time of India, Business line, Thinamar, Thinathanthi and Thiamani.

(iii) Preference for Online Newspapers

The table below shows the classification of respondents based on preference for online newspapers.

Table -1
Preference for Online Newspaper

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
Easy access	78 (50.9%)	41 (26.7%)	34 (22.2%)
Personalization	48 (31.3%)	71 (46.4%)	34 (22.2%)
Hyperlink	45 (29.4%)	49 (32.0%)	59 (38.5%)
Cost effective	51 (33.3%)	69 (45%)	33 (21.5%)
Quality of content	55 (35.9%)	60 (39.2%)	38 (24.8%)
Subscription options	51 (33.3%)	55 (35.9%)	47 (30.8%)
Availability of free content	51 (33.3%)	55 (35.9%)	47 (30.7%)
User friendly interface	53 (34.6%)	54 (35.2%)	46 (30.2%)
Environmentally friendly	63 (41.1%)	60 (39.2%)	30 (19.6%)
Anytime anywhere Access	48 (31.3%)	62 (40.5%)	43 (28.1%)
Easy to navigate	50 (32.6%)	55 (35.9%)	48 (31.3%)
Real time update	55 (35.9%)	60 (39.2%)	38 (24.8%)
Convenience	47 (30.7%)	53 (34.6%)	53 (34.6%)
Variety of topics	56 (36.6%)	56 (36.6%)	41 (26.7%)

From the above table, it is inferred that most of the respondents agree that they prefer online newspaper as it is easy to access, environmentally friendly, variety of topics, user friendly, availability of free content, easy to navigate, anytime anywhere access, real time update, convenience and cost effective.

(iv) Variables Influencing the Level of Preference for Online Newspaper

In order to find out the association between the selected variables namely age, area of residence, gender, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, number of members in the family,

monthly income, family income, sources of information, device used to read, period of usage and level of preference for online newspaper, Chi-square test has been used at five percent level of significance.

Table-2
Variables Influencing the Level of Preference for Online Newspaper

Variables	Calculated Chi-Square Value	D.f	Table Value @ 5% Level
Age	15.873*	6	12.592
Area of residence	5.021	2	5.991
Gender	4.507	2	5.991
Marital Status	4.536	2	5.991
Type of family	13.152*	6	12.592
Educational Qualification	13.499*	6	12.592
Occupation	18.229*	8	15.507
Number of Members in the Family	7.776	4	9.488
Monthly Income	14.533*	6	12.592
Family Income	13.629*	6	12.592
Sources of Information	11.599*	4	9.488
Device used to read	10.283*	4	9.488
Period of Usage	12.329*	4	9.488

The above discloses that out of thirteen variables selected, nine variables namely age, type of family, educational qualification, occupation, monthly income, family income, source of information, device used to read and period of usage are found to be significant with the level of preference for online newspaper at five percent level.

Suggestions

Based upon the study conducted, the following suggestions are made:

- Website can be fully optimized for smartphones and tablets, as most users now access news via mobile devices.
- Prioritize accurate reporting and transparent sources to build trust with audience. A visible corrections policy can boost credibility.
- Use videos, infographics, podcasts, and photo galleries to make content more engaging and digestible.
- Implement AI or algorithm-based recommendations to show readers content based on their interests and reading history.
- Enable comments, polls, and social media sharing to encourage community

Conclusion

The rise of online newspapers marks a significant shift in how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. With instant updates, multimedia integration, and broader accessibility, digital platforms have transformed traditional journalism into a more interactive and real-time experience. However, this evolution also brings challenges, including the need to combat misinformation, ensure journalistic integrity, and adapt to changing business models. As technology continues to advance, the success of online newspapers will depend on their ability to maintain credibility, engage readers, and innovate in the face of a rapidly changing media landscape.

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