

Understanding the News Seeking Behavior Online: A Study of Young Audiences in India

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Technology has changed the way we live and lead our lives. In our day-to-day life, we come across information in a variety of forms from diverse sources. The consumption patterns and sources vary from person to person. Although the causes are different the piece of information that is generated is more or less the same, only they vary in the format which is primarily governed by the type of medium each is exposed to. The rise in the variety of formats as well as content has increased rapidly with the advent of digital platforms and a tremendous increase in the penetration of the internet. This study attempts to find out the news consumption pattern among younger adults (25 to 35 years). The research adopts a quantitative approach to understand the consumption pattern. The study will provide relevant insight to the practitioners to gain an understanding on the emerging contours of news consumption and the “On Demand Culture” for news and information which became possible due to the digital revolution.

Keywords: Online news, Internet, digital platforms, younger people

The internet has profoundly changed the way we consume media. The idea of sitting with family and watching television with one cable connection or having one or two newspaper subscription per family is currently considered as a traditional form of media consumption. The rapid penetration of internet and smartphones has changed the content consumption habit in the current time to a more of individual activity. People are now involved in a range of activities online such as watching films, short-form contents, news, gaming, shopping, social interaction and education (Young, 2016). The concept of on-the-go accessibility and total control on their viewing experience, people are now more inclined towards online content platforms over the traditional format. With technological advancements such as broadband at home and new multimedia opportunities, the source of information seeking has also shifted to the online platforms, and there is a significant rise in news seeking through the online newspaper (Garrison, 2005).

The high penetration of internet is instrumental in the shift of media consumption habits of people from traditional to digital or online space. The web and the online newspaper world are in transition. As per a report in 2018 by Group M, the New York-based media investment group of WPP reported that people are now spending an average of 9.73 hours a day with media which has increased from 9.68 hours in 2017. Also as per the report by IAMAI (Internet and Mobile Association of India) and Kantar IMRB in 2018, the adults in India are spending more and more time in digital platforms which eventually

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shows a leap in the number of internet users by 11.34 percent from 2016 to 2017. The report also states that 60 percent of users in urban India are accessing the internet daily and are young people. The inception of the internet was so fast that to overcome the challenge immediately the traditional newspaper industry started to create and develop their news contents as online media contents. News aggregators are also evolved resulting in gathering news from various sources and filtering the news as per user's interests thus promptly transferring their controls over the news readers. Young internet users in the meantime also gained control over the news viewing by generating their information streams through social networking environments. In this way, the youth have contributed to the continuing evolution of online news. This eventually leads to stiff competition in the online environment where the dynamic and free news sites are plentiful, and the online user is no longer bound to a single news outlet and can move from one site to the other in just a click of a mouse/touch-button.

Given the fact that print newspapers have been a part of our everyday life in information seeking for a long time (Williamson, 1998; Wilson, 1977; Savolainen, 2008) and young people are more drawn towards more interactive online social environments their news seeking, web interactions, as well as reading behavior, have evolved with the new technology formats. It is therefore essential to study the news-seeking behavior of young adults to understand and predict changes and trends towards online news consumption. Places like libraries have also thought about aiming some online sources to attract the young readers. Amazon's Kindle and iPad are something which acted as a rewarding substitute to the young readers. Some other such initiatives of the libraries to attract their young readers as reported by researchers are: The British Library makes available to all its user's PDF copies of its current newspaper in circulation via their regular computer terminals (Fleming, 2009). Newspaperdirect.com's agreement with EBSCO is one of the efforts being made to provide digital access of newspaper to libraries in Asia (Awareness, 2010). Newspaperdirect.com has also created its entire library of 1400 newspaper available on Amazon Kindle's reader (Sabroski, 2010).

In light of the above discussions from various reports across the globe, it is quite evident that substantial users available online and are below 35 years. The purpose of this study is to investigate the news-seeking and browsing behavior of young adults, aged between 25 and 35 years by exploring their perceptions towards print and online news media. Broadly this study has attempted to examine the perception of younger people towards online news seeking/gathering and the factors governing their perceptions.

Literature Review

News Consumption Preferences

Online news consumption has become a staple for younger people. They do not consider the online news consumption as an alternative to offline media; instead this act as a source to fulfill their daily needs (Ahlers, 2006). The print media is eventually losing the young readers because they precisely do not cater to the younger generation (Graybeal, 2008; Kohl, 2008). Past researches on uses and gratification studies and information indicate that the users of print media are better informed than users of electronic media (Wade, 1969; Warner, 1973; Snowball, 2008). It was discussed in some research that online activity of young people is not only equated by reading but the time spent online is considered to be a notion being "informed citizen in the making" (Nguyen & Western, 2007). Ahlers (2006) explained that the

trend of online news browsing and the way it gained momentum among youths and people under 40 years of age. However, none of the studies has discussed how much browsing involved translated into serious reading online. The fact was established that the young generation browses the internet for news and information online communication is abundant and readily available; they hardly look for traditional media formats (Trends, 2012).

Many researchers also explained the reason behind the decline in the offline news consumption among youth which states reasons like lack of time, preference for other media and little interest in the content (Huang, 2009; Costera, 2007). Other important factors that made the daily news irrelevant for the younger generation is lack of connection to their personal experiences which leads to lack of interests (Patterson, 2007; Qayyum, 2010). Some literature discusses that young people fail to see themselves reflected in the newspaper or conventional media; instead, they consider these as on edge to their agenda setting (Faucher, 2009). All this matched the transformations that arise with digital convergence which promoted the emergence of multiple news providers through internet which generates a surplus of news and also an intense competition for the reader's attention (Prensky, 2001). Besides parental pressure plays a substantial impact on young people's news consumption (Qayyum, 2010; Costera, 2007).

Considering the global phenomena, it is evident in the various literature that young people news consumption habits have gradually shifted. In the US, young adults are not likely to engage themselves with news, be it in traditional or new media (Lee, 2012). The newspaper readership among young adult is also steadily declining in Europe (Blekesaune, 2012). Spanish young adults do not read the newspaper but have preferences for other media (Ripolles, 2012). The reach of the German press concerning consumption has steadily declined from 2006 onwards (Trends, 2012). The interest in news searches and consumption tends to grow when people grow older (Livingstone, 2008). Some researchers have also indicated gender as a critical factor regarding news consumption where they stated that men news consumption online is more intense than women (Lauf, 2001). Thus, we can conclude from the literature that there is a gradual shift in the consumption pattern of people from the traditional to online medium and multiple factors govern this shift according to their regular lifestyle and convenience.

Perceived Relative Advantage

Attitude towards the new technology is directed by the belief towards the technology which again influences the individual intends to use it. Therefore, perception plays a crucial role in establishing belief and fundamentally affects the implementation process. Five perceived characteristics affect consumer adoptions towards a new technology— relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, observability, and trialability (Rogers, 2001). In the context of the current study, perceived relative advantage can be considered as a whole and critical variable that can be used as a multifaceted innovation which means that the consumption of news via technology serves several purposes. Some studies also highlighted “relative advantage” as a robust variable influencing the adoption of technologies across different communication (Manson, 1993; Runge, 2001; Lin, 2001; Li, 2004; Ramdani, 2009).

Perceived Usefulness and Ease of Use: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which deals with technology adoption and acceptance (Davis, 1986) suggests that individual responsiveness to accept technology is dependent on two philosophies – usefulness and ease of use. The

perceived usefulness and the ease of use together build the attitude towards adoption and usage of technology which is very crucial in understanding the drive behind the news seeking and gathering in digital platforms or online.

Media Usage

As suggested by the theory of media attendance, habit plays an essential role in the media usage behavior which helps to gain an understanding on the linkage between media and medium as presumed in the uses and gratification model. The usage of a specific media is likely to continue until there is a change in the day to day schedule (Eastin, 2004). So it is very likely that online news audiences would have certain media consumption propensities that condition their desire to access news in a variety of platforms without any geographic limitations. Nguyen and Western (2007) documented a very different relationship between online and traditional media sources and proposed that people who use online sources for searching news and information tend to use news sources on traditional media also. In the context of online media usage, Simon and Kadiyali (2007) suggested that the online media have substantial advantages over traditional offline media because the online platforms are observed to have the capacity of holding an enormous amount of contents. Also, suitable news accessing mechanisms also enhances the perceived image.

Methodology

Based on the discussion and above, the attributes or the variables that emerged in the study is a relative advantage, ease of use and usefulness of the online platforms that govern the news seeking behavior. To validate and test the variables the following hypotheses are framed, and further tested using an appropriate statistical test.

H1: Relative advantage is significantly associated with online news seeking behavior

H2: Ease of use is significantly associated with online news seeking behavior

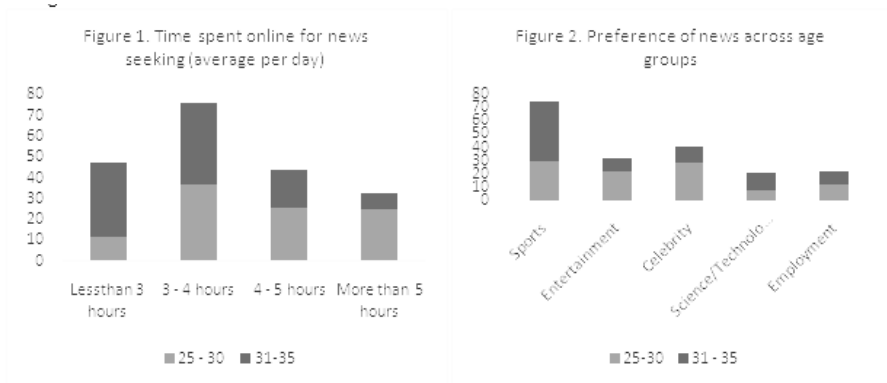
H3: Usefulness is significantly associated with online news seeking behavior

The study was intended to investigate the influences governing the news gathering of young people using a quantitative approach. Primary data was collected through a duly framed structured questionnaire. The survey tool was inducted to the respondents all of whom were working professional whose involvement was obtained with the criteria 'age' and 'interest in the news.' In total, the survey was administered to 260 respondents out of which 220 completed the study. Further, 210 responses had been given as usable, complete data and can be considered for final analysis in the study. The overall response rate is 80 percent. The data collection for the study took place between 10th August and 10th October 2018. The participants' responses were collected by interviewing them personally or through a telephonic call. The target group considered for the present study are people aged within 25 to 35 years residing in the urban locality in India. The participants convened into two groups based on their age: 53% of the participants are between 25 and 30 years, and 47% are between 30 and 35 years. The data distribution by gender indicates 55% of male and 45% of the female.

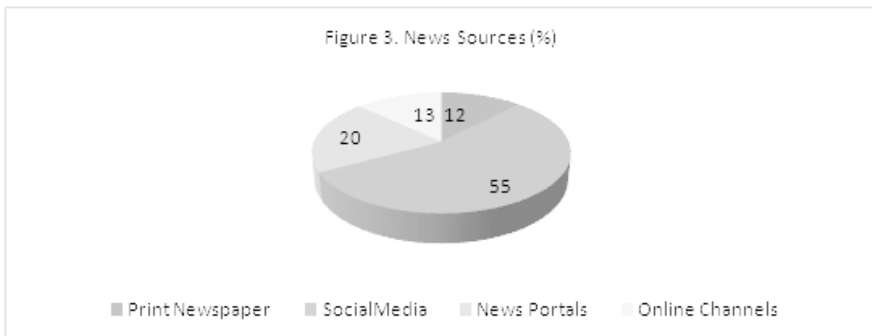
To test the suitability of the scales, a pilot study conducted signifies whether the constructs are reliable and valid. The items in the questionnaire are tested through Cronbach's alpha test to check the reliability of each the items. The Cronbach Alpha value is recorded as 0.801 which shows the acceptable reliability of the item. Higher alpha values (more than 0.7) indicate that the constructs are reliable and are evaluating the basic concept of research (Churchill, 1979).

Findings

The researcher initially sought information regarding awareness toward various news platforms and interest of the young adults towards news source. Then the study collected information on the type of news that young people are interested in and the frequency of news-seeking behavior. Almost every respondent is very much prone towards news gathering through online platforms; the diversity exists in the rate of use and the news seeking pattern. The preference for various type of communication varies across the considered age-groups. The details of the findings are discussed and shown in the figure below. Figure 1 indicates the average time spent by young adults in the news seeking. It is evident from the preliminary data gathering that an average of 3- 4 hours a day (minimum) is the time spent online in news seeking. On the exciting part of the news item, the young adults look for sports news followed by celebrity and entertainment news and then moving to the science/technology and employment-related news activity which is indicated in Figure 2. Although there are many more activities that each age group is engaged with online platforms but these are the most common or preferred activities in terms of surfing.



Later this section will focus on the sources of news. While conducting the survey, the research also highlighted on understanding the critical sources from where the young adult seek/ gather the news. Although there is mention of multiple sources during the survey; however the research cites only those sources which were widely used by the majority of the respondents for seeking news. The details are given in the figure (Figure 3) below.



The study shows that social media emerged as the primary source of news gathering followed by the news portals and online news channels and print newspaper. The survey also clarified on the point that social media is also the most convenient route to source news. Facebook emerged as the most popular platform followed by Twitter for news seeking. Many respondents also prefer the print newspaper to indicate that they prefer print newspaper only (when they are at home relaxing or when they are not in a hurry to go to work). Further, it was also mentioned by the respondents that the online platforms like social media and the news portals are convenient because they can get the “News-On-Go” and hence is mostly preferred.

The researcher also conducted an analysis using SPSS to conclude and test the research hypotheses framed. The data was analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to conclude and justify the findings. **H1** posited that relative advantage is significantly associated with the online news seeking behavior which is supported. The ANOVA test run with the test variables shows that the test variable relative advantage is significantly associated with the online news seeking behavior with $f=104.36$ and $p\text{-value}=0.00$ which is accepted less than the significant value of 0.05. This holds the hypothesis correct. The second hypothesis **H2** suggested that ease of use is significantly related to online news seeking behavior. The hypothesis is well supported through statistical analysis which concludes the f value as 40.96 and $p\text{-value}$ is 0.00 which is less than the significantly associated value of 0.05. Finally, the third hypothesis **H3** posited that usefulness is significantly associated with the online news seeking behavior which is also well supported with $f=50.61$ and $p\text{-value}=0.00$ which also holds significant at the given level of 0.05. Thus the statistical analysis completely supports the fact that the online news seeking behavior is significantly related to relative advantage, usefulness, and ease of use.

Conclusion

Digitization has brought a remarkable shift in the communicative system which has transformed the public consumption patterns modifying the traditional dynamics. In this context, ascertaining the changing habits of readers’ consumption pattern is imperative in comprehending the scope and effect of digital convergence. The purpose of this study is to focus primarily on the consumption habits and pattern of a specific age group: young people. Efforts have been given to systematically collate as much of relevant data as possible, in as much detail as an individual researcher can. At the very outset it was explained from findings of various literature that in the present scenario, the newspaper is no longer the only or primary source of information for young people. This does not mean that young people are longer interested in the news; instead, it is acknowledged that young people are more active in gaining information and their appetite for news seeking has increased. The young people are now more informed about the news and the type of story they consume or subscribe to.

The research elaborately analyses and the news consumption and gathering pattern of the younger generation. Here the age group considered in between 25-35 years of age and primarily the working people who are independent regarding generating their livelihood. The research came up with interesting findings. Firstly through the survey, the researcher tried to explore the time spent by them while browsing/searching news. The average time spent by the young age people is a minimum of 3-4 hours. The younger people usually seek news from various social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter or through news portals or websites. The young people were interested in a mix of entertainment, and that

hard news and particularly local news of immediate relevance were perceived as significant. The participants emphasized that the online platforms for news were used because sharing the news with friends is possible due to the short formats of news. The frequency of information consumption and interest in hard news increases as younger readers mature and accessibility becomes a key factor, as young people demand quick and easy access to information. The participants also mentioned that print newspaper is also a good option and they do prefer reading print newspaper when they are at home on a day off and can spend some time comfortably seeing the paper.

Interestingly news on television is something that they would like to watch when they are enjoying their dinner with their family, and the television news plays in the background so that the entire family can listen to it together. Local news is also of great interest and some participants also indicated that subscription of regional newspaper is also what they prefer which again is also a fundamental reason for considering online platforms because the online platforms provides more ease and convenience in exploring regional news without any limitations/restrictions in numbers. Further, the young sample is categorised under two age categories. Firstly, the 25 to 30 age category which distinctively clarified their choices to be primarily news or information related to sports followed by celebrity and entertainment news and then moving to hard news related to employment search and news related to science and technology. While in the category of 31 to 35 age participants, sports news is again something which is highly followed along with the report on science and technology, entertainment, celebrity, and employment.

Lastly, the research also explored the factors that govern the attitude and perception of young people towards online news. From the literature review, some of the factors that emerged which considered as critical variables under the study are the relative advantage, usefulness and ease of use for news seeking in the online platforms. These variables are further tested framing hypothesis with the considered samples in the study. It came out exclusively that ease of use, relative advantage and usefulness is associated strongly with the online news seeking behavior. Easily accessible news or information is an essential factor that affects the consumer choice or preference towards the online platforms. They also prefer online primarily due to the associated advantages which help in quicker adoption of technologies for communication.

Thus in contrary, we can also conclude that the advantages associated with the technology or in the online platforms are perceived as useful which in turn is affecting the adoption of these platforms and are some of the factors that diverted the focus of younger generations towards online platforms. Although online news is gaining trend due to its variety of advantages and usefulness associated with this format and diverse options, the news reading or seeking is more like a habit which will continue to remain across generations. The only thing that may change with time are the sources from where they will acquire the news.

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