

FUTURE OF PRINT MEDIA IN DIGITAL AGE : A STUDY ON NEWSPAPER READERS OF MYMENSINGH DIVISION IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

1.1 Prelude

Newspaper is a significant part of mass media, with the oldest one being the *Acta Diurna* of Ancient Rome (Raji et al., 1997 and Britannica, 2024). The first newspaper was launched in 1780 in Calcutta, India, and later expanded to East Bengal with the Partition of Bengal in 1947. The first newspapers in Bangladesh were *The Daily Ittefaq* and *The Daily Sangbad*, which remain prominent pioneers. The newspaper industry in Bangladesh has grown since the 1990s, with new enterprises formed due to the abolishment of some clauses of the special power acts in 1974. Leading national dailies like *Bhorer Kagoj*, *Ajker Kagoj*, *The Daily Prothom Alo*, *The Daily Star*, and *The Daily Janakantha* etc. have led the industry.

But in around 2000s the digital technology, internet and other necessary technologies had been introduced more in the newspaper arena. This got an extra attention when bdnews24.com, the country first online news-portal was first introduced in 2005 and officially in 23 October 2006 (Khan and Shnaider, 2021). Before that, *The Daily Star* started to develop website for their newspaper. So the online and offline version have started to move forward side by side. While technological development and internet facilities advance, the online news-portals have got momentum and simultaneously the printed newspapers also started its online version. These online versions and news-portals also started to reach through social media like Facebook, YouTube etc. Therefore a clear convergence of mass media has been visible and operational in the 21st century. But the dual existences of print and online news-portals have influences upon the readers as a whole.

The readers' views are considered importantly to look into. The world-wide printed newspapers have been closing day by day. In this connection, the future of the print media especially the newspapers of Bangladesh could be comprehensively investigated from the readers' viewpoint. This effort would help for print newspaper understand the real situation and take coping strategy to survive in future.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The role of mass media in modern society is verity in nature. Mass media govern the modern society giving right direction where people's life would be easy and peaceful. The press or mass media is considered as a fourth estate of a nation. As a traditional format of mass media, the print media, specifically the newspaper has been playing a vital role to disseminate message and information, educate and persuade people and entertain since the last two and half centuries in the subcontinent. Reading newspaper could open up the horizons of people's learning domain of brain cell and increase knowledge. It is also a store house of knowledge. As of 30 June 2023, a total of 1,311 daily newspapers were registered for publication in Bangladesh (PID, 2024). But the advancement of ICTs has created a long term impact on everyday life of the people. In every sector of life, digital technology has been changing everything. People are now being accustomed to digital technology, smart phones, social media and internet. The printed newspaper has been facing challenges in its off-line existence. The printed newspaper has also been convergent with digital technologies simultaneously. It could be one of the coping strategies to survive. But fourth industrial revolution (4IR) with AI, robotics would definitely create another pressure upon the printed newspaper industry. So it can be assumed that the advancement of digital technology

always interacts with print media like newspaper. The readers' perception, choices, demand and behavior with newspapers have also been affected by it. The newspaper readers' thinking on printed version is necessary to analyze to understand the future of newspaper clearly for the smooth existence of the industry as a whole. To the best of my knowledge, there are very few researches conducted on daily newspaper readers' viewpoint in this regard. The study would deal these matters through a systematic investigation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to analyze comprehensively the pros and cons of future and challenges of print media in digital age on daily newspaper readers of Mymensingh division in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- a) analyze the current situation of daily newspaper as print media in the eye of its readers of Mymensingh Division in Bangladesh;
- b) examine the prospects of newspaper in digital age from readers perspective in Bangladesh;
- c) identify the challenges derived from the advancement of digital technology for the existence of newspaper as traditional print media;
- d) explore co-relations among different factors affects newspaper as traditional print media in digital era; and
- e) estimate the future of printed newspapers in digital age in Bangladesh.

1.4 Review of Literatures

Noman (2023) studied the perception of news managers in Bangladesh's media houses on the future of print media, finding that newspapers are necessary and relevant mediums. Tajrin (2016) found that 77.8% of respondents consumed daily newspapers online, with a majority preferring the internet. Akanda and Haque (2013) found that graduate students prefer library readings over computer centers for online newspapers. Hassan et al. (2021) highlighted the influence of new media technology on subscriptions, readership, circulation, and advertisement revenue. Ashong & Ogaraku (2017) found that 80% of respondents read both versions of newspapers, with content being immaterial and availability being the determinant. Jubayer (2015) noted a sharp fall in circulation and revenue in Bangladesh after 2013, indicating the need for a digital age newsroom and new marketing models. Singh (2018) studied the relevance of digital media in India and the changing dynamics of media usage.

On the basis of above literature review it can be said that there is knowledge gap in this regard. Since no study is found to conduct on the newspaper readers of an administrative division like Mymensingh. To some extent relevant these literatures also indicate that there is scope enough to conduct a study with different objectives and aspects. The study would be aiming to fill the existing research gap.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

One of the theoretical bases of the study is Roger Fidler's "**Mediamorphosis Theory**" which is about the death of print media. The main assumption of the theory is that the new models of communication viz. new media emerge, the old models of communication like print newspaper don't die but adapt to new environment and survive (Fidler, 1997, p. xv). According to Fidler, in the emergence of a new medium, the old media can adopt and even coexist with the new medium

for improved and better performance. He explained the theory with six principles such as Coevolution and Coexistence; Metamorphosis; Propagation; Survival; Opportunity and Need; and Delayed Adoption through which his assumption of how older media can coexist and survive in spite of the growing of a new medium (Ahmad & Jimoh, no date).

“Media Displacement Theory” originally introduced by Maxwell McCombs (1972) is also considered for this study to develop theoretical base because of the emergence of the online and digital media and having consequences on other old media like newspaper, magazine etc. When a new communication technology is introduced, people use other media to a lesser extent. For example, if you get an mp3 player, you won’t use a walk-man as much, or if you love watching TV than you are not socializing with any other media. The attention would be more on newer one than older and others. This theory is relevant to the study as how readers read old media like newspaper, how readers accept online news-portal and what are the readers thinking about the print and online news media.

1.6 Rationale of the Study

In the country newspaper is considered as an industry where hundreds of crore of money have been invested and thousands of people have also been working in the sector. But the advancement digital technology has been challenging the print media like newspaper. The readers’ habit and perception of reading printed newspapers have been changing rapidly. For its existence, the print newspaper has been convergent into online version. But it is important to know how far and to what extent this convergence would continue in future. There is knowledge gap in this arena. The readers thinking and perception are needed to investigate to focus on the future of the newspaper industry. Though the study would be done on Mymensingh division, but it is expected to have a clear picture on it to fix the future strategy to cope with. The findings of the study would also be useful to the academic arena. Researchers could get insights on the issue. Policy planners would also be benefited with the findings of the study in different manners.

1.7 Methodology

The study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Therefore a social survey and content analysis method have applied for the study. The study was conducted in Mymensingh administrative division. Four districts like Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Netrokona and Sherpur have taken for conducting the study.

1.7.1 Sampling and Determination of Sample Size

The population of the study was all daily newspaper readers either in offline or online living in Mymensingh administrative division. To draw the sample, the following formula will be applied:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where, n= sample size, p= sample proportion = 0.5, q=1 - p= 1-0.5 = 0.5, z = 1.96 (95% confidence level of nominal curve worked out from the table) e = error = 0.05 (error of 95% of confidence level). By calculation, the total sizes of population would be 384 (Kothari, 2003). The final sample size was 396 to maintain the cluster sampling as 4 Upazials × 11 categories × 9 respondents. The sample size of each study area of four districts was the equal like 396/4=99. From each district, one Upazila was selected randomly through lottery process. In this way, four Upazilas viz. Mymensingh Sadar, Mymensingh; Purba Dhala, Netraokona; Sherpur Sadar, Sherpur; and

Madarganj, Jamalpur were selected. To select the respondents, cluster sampling technique was applied. First of all the newspaper readers were clustered into 11 categories as follows:

Table-1.1: Category of Newspapers Readers' Cluster

Sl. No.	Readers' Cluster	No. of the Respondents
1.	Students of Class IX & X	36
2.	Students of XI & XII	36
3.	Students of BA/ BCoM /BSS/BBA	36
4.	Students of MA/MCoM /MSS/MBA	36
5.	Govt. Service Holders	36
6.	Businessman	36
7.	Home Maker	36
8.	Unemployed	36
9.	Political Activists	36
10.	Non-govt. Service Holders	36
11.	Teachers	36
	Total	396

A total of 99 respondents were selected cluster-wise randomly from every selected Upazila.

1.7.2 Collection of Data

Mainly questionnaire survey and content analysis method were applied to collect primary and secondary data respectively. Furthermore, books, journals, websites, newspaper etc. were also used as secondary sources of data. For primary data collection, a structured questionnaire was prepared and pre-tested accordingly. After pretesting, necessary corrections were done and finalized for data collection.

1.7.3 Data Analysis and Presentation

Collected data were tabulated and analyzed through IBM SPSS 25 version software and STATA 14 version. Some descriptive statistical measures like mean, median, average, percentage, correlation, chi-square test etc. were done and graph, chart, table etc. were also used to present analyzed data.

2. Major Findings of the Study

The print media in digital age is now-a-days a serious issue to discuss since the tremendous advancement of technology has already been done. This advancement has changed the total atmosphere of the newspaper industry like other sectors of the country. The survival and coping strategy is very much important for the existence of newspaper industry in Bangladesh. Thinking this, the study started with a general of objective of analyzing comprehensively the pros and cons of future and challenges of print media in digital age on daily newspaper readers of Mymensingh division in Bangladesh. Both male (71.7%) and female (28.3%) having educational background from class VIII to MA/Equivalent, were taken for the study. The age limits were 15 years to 75 years.

2.1 The Current Situation of Daily Newspaper as Print Media

To analyze the situation of print newspaper in the digital age, there are some factors for considerations. The readers don't read the printed newspaper regularly (33.1%) rather irregular readers are found more (66.9%). Readers also like Bengali newspaper to read more (79.5%). The readers have read printed version by 15.2% only whereas online medium is used by 37.1% of the

respondents. To read online newspaper, the readers like social media (64.9%) and they are also satisfied with online media (43.7%) more than printed version (34.3%). The most of the readers like *The Daily Prothom Alo* (70%) followed by *Bangladesh Pratidin* (45%), *The Daily Jugantor* (19%), *Samakal* (18%) and others. There are some causes to read newspaper like having idea on overall situation of the country (74%), to know about world affairs (53%) etc. The readers don't buy newspapers in a large scale. Only 19.4% of the respondent buy printed newspaper on regular basis while 39.4% occasionally. The readers feel comfortable to read online (91%). Among the contents of the newspaper the toper item is in-county news (25.8%) followed by political news (21.5%).

The findings of the current situation of printed newspaper indicate that the situation is not satisfactory rather weak situation is prevailing compare to online news-portals.

2.2 Prospects of Newspaper in Digital Age

Digital technology has opened up the opportunity for the printed newspaper as well. The print media can engage the digital technology for the betterment of its services. It is found that reading printed newspapers (98.5%) and online news-portals (98.7%), readers have enjoyed. 'Not having enjoyment' is found very poor amount for both the offline and online newspapers. The online newspapers' readers have been increasing opined by 88.9% of the respondents. The readers have evaluated the role of newspaper in such a way that it has scope to improve. Newspapers in Bangladesh are highly political biased (38%) and role was more effective in earlier (34%). It means there is an opportunity to improve its role. The existing newspapers also fulfill the readers' expectation (58.8%). In regard to easy and comfortable media, online newspaper is found more comfortable (59.6%) than printed newspaper (40.4%). The readers have thought that introducing online version (convergent) (51%), quick presenting the news (46%) and facility to all-time update (35%) etc. could be possible with the advantages of the digital technology. Most of the readers (62%) have mentioned that newspaper can provide information in any crisis of the country while active in different social issues like environment, disasters, adulteration, price hike etc. (61%) and opportunity to promote dissent (33%) are also thought by the readers as the prospects of print newspaper.

According to the findings, the prospect of printed newspaper is found not smooth rather having competition and challenges with online news-portals. Opportunity depending on technology adaptation is there, but it needs to be properly addressed and implemented.

2.3 The Challenges Derived from the Advancement of Digital Technology

The study has identified some challenges derived from the advancement of digital technology. Some challenges mentioned by the respondents are as such increasing of online news-portal subscribers (54%), easy availability of online news-portals (37%), less operational cost of online news-portal (35%) etc. In competing with online news-portals, the printed newspaper subscribers' could be decreased (85.4%), it would not survive (52%) and it would not make profit (63.1%). The advertising would go to online news-portal (90.9%) more than printed newspaper.

So the challenges could be addressed. In this regard, the readers have also expected some changes in print newspaper in future so that the survival could be done. 55% of the respondents have wanted more information/ content, 41% have expected more digitalization in newspapers

while among others less advertisement and update in every moment is expected by 36% and 34% of the respondents respectively.

2.4 Associations of Different Factors and Estimation of Future of Printed Newspaper in Bangladesh

According to the analysis of association of some independent variables, Chi-Square Tests (χ^2) results also hint the future of the print media like newspaper of Bangladesh. For example, the irregular readers read online, printed and both types of newspapers more than regular readers of printed newspaper. The regular readers' trend to read printed newspaper was found not so high compared to irregular readers. So the future of print media like newspaper could be thoughtful in this regard. Rather trend of online newspaper reading was found a bit higher (Figure-5.1 in main report). The online, printed and both types of newspaper readers are showed the same medium dominating and the trend of dominating on online media compare between offline and online media (Figure-5.2 in main report). The regular newspaper readers subscribe more than irregular newspaper readers. But it is also important that irregular newspaper readers have shown larger number of not having subscriptions which indicates the irregular newspaper readers' purchasing trend is lower or down (Figure-5.3 in main report). The regular print newspaper readers are showing good satisfaction (good=4) less than irregular newspaper readers. The regular readers have shown good and highly satisfaction (5) more rather the irregular readers have shown moderate (3) and good satisfaction more (Figure-5.4 in main report). The online newspapers have shown more comfortable & easy compare to printed newspaper in the perspective of fulfilling the expectation by the newspaper (Figure-5.6 in main report). The print newspapers have shown less possibility to earn profit in competing with online news-portals (Figure-5.7 in main report).

Finally, on the basis of the findings, it can be said that the printed newspaper would not die but the future of the print media like newspapers of Bangladesh can be considered a bit vulnerable unless and until the digital technology is adopted comprehensively. The future of printed newspaper is also appeared some real challenges from online news-portals' positive growth.

3. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, the followings could be considered as recommendations:

- The print newspaper can adopt updated and advanced digital technologies in all possible sections of the media house.
- The print newspaper can be convergent with digital and social media in all aspects.
- Adjustment of advertisements in the pages and every-moment updates could be considered.
- The content like in-country news could be emphasized more and politically biased contents could be decreased.