

EXPLORING THE LEVEL OF ACCEPTANCE OF E-NEWSPAPERS OVER PRINT NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Newspapers have been a dominant medium of communication and knowledge transfer around the world for over four centuries. Recently, due to the exponential rise of the Internet and online platforms to satisfy the knowledge demands of consumers, news consumers are slowly shifting to digital platforms to consume news. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption process of digital channels and e-newspapers, and potentially questions the relevance of printed newspapers. The objective of this study is to understand the behavioral change or acceptance of Bangladeshi newspaper readers in light of the rising demand for e-newspapers. This study applies a qualitative approach where in-depth interviews of 60 people from diverse demographic backgrounds and geographical locations were conducted for data collection. According to the findings, e-newspapers are considered to be faster, accessible, and convenient especially to young generation. However, quality of connection, news trustworthiness, digital literacy and cost related to e-newspaper reading are some of the factors that are still considered as not that improved or developed. On the other hand, printed newspapers still count as an icon of the habit, cultural heritage, convenience of reading and storing, and affordability to middle aged and elderly generation. Therefore, the finding of this research suggests the coexistence of both print newspapers and e-newspapers as both versions have demand. While the younger generation may be comfortable with the transition to e-newspapers, the general newspaper readers especially professionals from sub-urban areas along with older generation both in metropolitan cities and sub-urban areas still prefer print newspapers.

Keywords: Print media, e-Newspaper, Qualitative analysis, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers have been a crucial part of people's lives over the last 400 years. It has been a mainstay in the daily routines of people from all over the world. From politics and society to culture and major historical events, newspapers are safe-keepers of history. Hamilton (1992) mentions that newspapers had the power to impact politics and mass opinions. After surviving countless adversities stretching over almost four centuries, the conventional print newspapers face the greatest threat to its existence: online media. Over time, as technology started dominating people's lives, the newspaper industry, like many other industries, faced the impact of digitization.

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An integral segment of Information Communication & Technology (ICT), the Internet has revolutionized every field of innovation (Lumbantobing, Setyohadi & Santoso, 2019). Changes in access, production, and circulation of information have been possible because of Internet. (Flavian & Gurrea, 2007). Besides that, for an environmentally sustainable planet, it is possible to prevent the usage of paper raw materials if digital newspapers are made prevalent.

High smartphone, Internet, and social media penetration have made news consumption almost instantaneous and digital newspaper can be accessed with smartphone devices, tablets, and PC connected to the Internet. The advantage of audio-video and interactivity of the digital platforms make online news appealing. In addition, easy accessibility, free of cost, and interactivity have allowed mass adoption of e-newspapers.

Because of these benefits of the e-newspapers and changing news consumption habits of the mass market, print newspaper circulation has significantly decreased. Tavares (2019) mentioned that newspaper circulation decreased from 63 million to 31 million in the USA since the late 1980s. Print newspaper circulation in the United Kingdom has reduced by 28% (Thomas, 2018). But is the rate decreasing the same way in developing countries where still the Internet penetration rate is low?

Newspaper companies in developing countries have also faced worries in keeping their printed newspaper circulation intact like in the developed nations around the world. According to the Film and Publication Department (FPD, 2020) of the Information Ministry of Bangladesh, 552 newspapers are published in Bangladesh out of which 254 are published in Dhaka (the capital of Bangladesh) and 298 are from outside Dhaka. Besides, statistics also show the rapid expansion of the Internet, mobile users, and social media consumers in Bangladesh. According to the 2021 survey by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the total number of mobile subscribers has reached 163 million, and social media users reached five million in Bangladesh (BTRC, 2020). Additionally, the number of Internet subscribers is 113 million (BTRC 2021). As a result, more than eight thousand news portals applied for registration to the information ministry of Bangladesh (bdnews24.com, 2019). Many of the news providers have shifted to digital platforms to share news. Although more people have started using Internet in Bangladesh by using smart phones and other gadgets. However, the penetration rate is still just 38.9% (The Daily Star: Dec 30, 2022; BBS, 2022). The same BBS (2022) poll also discovered a significant difference between urban and rural households' Internet usage rates: just 29.7% of rural households use the Internet, compared to 63% of urban households. Besides, digital skill is required to accept digital innovations. So, there is this skill gap in lower income countries and in countries with low literacy (New Age: July 14, 2022). Bangladesh's literacy rate now is 74.66% as per the preliminary report of "Population and Housing Census 2022" compared to 51.77 in 2011. However, a recent survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund and the Education Commission of Bangladesh says that 84.9 percent of the youth, aged 15–24 years, lack the necessary digital skills (Hossain, 2022). That means three-fourths of about 30.9 million youth of the age group in Bangladesh do not have the required digital skills, which

limits the ability of using and understanding technology and performing basic computer-related activities (Hossain, 2022).

Although researchers and media professionals contemplate whether digital platforms will signal the end of print newspapers, the scenario seems to be different for Bangladesh. Islam (2020) did mention that print newspaper circulation has significantly gone down by 5-10% every year because of the proliferation of digital platforms. However, is it going to take over printed newspaper completely? Based on that, this paper aims to access the effects of the shift from print newspapers to e-newspapers at consumer level in Bangladesh.

The literature undertaken for this study suggests that no study has yet systematically investigated the effects of the shift from print newspapers to e-newspapers in a developing country where the digital acceptance has not yet taken place. With the application of technology acceptance framework by Davis (1989) this can be explained. Also, there is no literature as of today on Bangladesh newspaper industry that reflected this transition. So, this study is expected to contribute to knowledge gap by finding out the consumers acceptance of e-newspapers in a country where the digital literacy, Internet penetration and high cost still making print newspaper an obvious option for newspaper reading.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Media consumption patterns in general have changed because of the news consumption through digital platform (Subudhi, 2021). However, it is not possible to deny the fact that both print and e-newspapers have advantages and scope to co-exist. Therefore, this paper has two research questions:

1. What are the consumer-level effects due to the digital transformation of newspapers?
2. What should be done to support the current condition?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the first innovation of the printing press by Guttenberg in mid-1400, digital newspaper has turned out to be the latest addition to the existing list of modern innovations (Åkesson, 2009). The telegraph, which was the second innovation revolutionizing the newspaper industry, was invented in 1844 which radically changed the mode of accumulating material and spreading breaking news (Åkesson, 2009). The media market was penetrated by the radio and television in the first half of the 20th century. The media house organization now has its online newspaper channel which has its own form and content. (Eriksson & Kalling, 2007). The motivation for the reading newspaper commonly is acquiring knowledge of current news, search for specific information and updated news, leisure-entertainment and habit (Flavián & Gurrea, 2007). Some of the notable advantages of digital newspaper are style and presentation of the content of the news, links to available sections, easy options for turning pages, linking to dynamic indexes, searching, saving and printing options, and multimedia and hyperlink features (Panda & Swain, 2011).

Researchers (Flavián & Gurrea, 2007) have conducted some experimental studies on the viability of digital newspapers, and the results of these studies confirm that readers are motivated by factors primarily related to the differences between the Internet and traditional media and see both as information conduits rather than competitors. According to Davis (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw (1989), whether newspapers have been successfully transitioning toward technologically advanced media and how well the changes are keeping up with consumer needs (Åkesson, 2009), provides an understanding of how and why new digital products and services are accepted and adopted or not. Well, the scenario is quite different in developed and developing countries. As digital literacy and ICT infrastructure are very much related to the Internet penetration rate of a country, developing countries are still on a novice stage of accepting digital or e-newspaper.

E-NEWSPAPERS: IS IT A THREAT TO PRINT/TRADITIONAL NEWSPAPERS?

Print newspapers are well-researched as every release becomes a part of record and history. As a result, newspapers are more complete than non-traditional mediums (Kurnia et al., 2021). Credibility and information accuracy of quality journalists are crucial to create public trust and keep print newspapers relevant (Kusuma, 2016; Firmansyah & Asgha, 2020). Print newspapers are more researched, accurate, and credible as evidences and has been a reservoir of history and civilizations (Kusuma, 2016).

Print media industries around the world have experienced a decline, enforcing leading media companies to pursue online platforms strategically (McKenney, 2018). Increasing power of technological devices and decreasing cost of smartphones and Internet connections have accelerated this shift, impacting revenues (both circulation and advertising) of the print newspapers severely because of decreased demand, circulation of print newspapers decreased as well. People who are comfortable with print newspapers are getting deprived. The very existence of something that has been a mainstay not only in our social fabric but also as a source of entertainment is being challenged (Nurliah, 2018; Restendy, 2020). But is the scenario same for all countries?

People's way of interactions has changed as a result of technological improvements (Mwiya, Phiri, & Lyoko, 2015). People desire the option to Interact and communicate more quickly, which digital platforms provide. (Mpolokoso & Phiri, 2018). Several studies indicate that young people prefer information from digital platforms. Because online news is more instantaneous, readily available, and free of cost, making it ideal for youth adoption. However, reliability of online news still raises more questions than answers (Marchi, 2012; Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2020).

Tewari (2016) conducted a survey on 3,183 news readers who consume news through digital platforms in India to understand how digital platforms impact print newspaper. Results show that 90% of the participants read print newspapers but the readership is decreasing among the youth. In Zambia, both print and e-newspapers are read simultaneously and e-newspapers could not threaten the print newspapers (Sinyangwe & Phiri, 2017).

BANGLADESH SCENARIO

Newspapers have historically been important to politics, conflict, and democracy in Bangladesh (Khairuzzaman, 2017). Although many reputable newspapers have closed in the US and Europe, the situation in Asia is not as dire as it is in the West. Even if some older newspapers have shut down or drastically reduced their circulation during the past two decades, Bangladesh is one of the few countries where the newspaper industry may endure for many years. The oldest newspaper in the nation, Daily Ittefaq, had a healthy circulation (around 425,000 copies) until the middle of the 1990s. This daily's circulation has decreased to as few as 50,000 copies. On the other side, Bangladesh Protidin, a new Bengali newspaper created in 2010, has a far bigger circulation than Daily Ittefaq (Khairuzzaman, 2017).

Because of poverty and the low literacy rate, newspaper circulation has historically been minimal. Press circulation has become much more challenging as a result of social media, faster Internet access, and 24-hour television. The younger generations are choosing digital news services over print publications since they are less interested in reading them.

According to Matiur Rahman, Editor and Publisher of Prothom Alo, the nation's most popular and influential Bengali newspaper, "Like the western countries, our print media is also under threat as most newspapers are losing circulation, readership, and revenue with the arrival of television stations and online news portals in quick succession." In his opinion, only a small number of reputable newspapers will survive the challenges posed by TV stations and new media, while the majority will cease to exist in the years to come.

Print is the second most widely used media in the nation, with a readership of 23.8%, according to the 2016 National Media Survey (NMS). Since 2014, there has been a 1.4% decrease in readership. One intriguing finding is that despite the growth of TV and the Internet, print readership hasn't decreased all that much. Newspaper consumption was determined to be 25.8% of the population in 2002, up from 12% in 1995 and 15% in 1998, according to the NMS. Similar results from the Nielsen Bangladesh 2017 National Media and Demographic Survey were also observed, with readership increasing from 26.9 percent in 2011 to 25.68% in 2015 before abruptly declining to 13.45% in 2017.

Leading newspapers are implementing new efforts in light of this, including the multimedia presentation of news and features as well as the live streaming of events and interviews on Facebook sites. In order to compete with broadcasters, online news portals, and social media, certain newspapers, such as the Bengali dailies ProthomAlo and Samakal and the English daily, The Daily Star, are investing more in their web outlets.

In accordance with information provided by the Minister of Information to the National Parliament in January 2018, there are 3,025 print media outlets registered in Bangladesh, 1,191 of which are daily newspapers. In total, 470 of the daily newspapers are located in Dhaka, the nation's metropolis.

Newspapers are published in every administrative region of this nation, which is a distinctive trait. According to the Information Ministry's most recent statistics, there are 267 local daily newspapers outside of the Dhaka city. It should be noted that many of the regional newspapers do not publish on a regular basis. However, there are some well-known and reputable ones that are consistently published. Dainik Karatoa, Dainik Purbokone, and Dainik Puranchal, for instance, are well-liked in their respective regions.

The sheer number of English-language daily newspapers—32 in total, with only a small percentage coming from outside the nation's capital—is another astounding discovery. Not all the English dailies are published on a regular basis, like many Bengali daily. The truth is that the English daily have a low circulation and are not widely read in Bangladesh, with the exception of a handful.

The printed form of the newspaper has always been quite a part of the daily routine for the educated people in Bangladesh. The estimated Bengali newspaper circulation is around 1.5 million among which, over 90% belong to the 10 leading national newspapers. Compared to that, English print readership is low, around 70,000 among which The Daily Star has 77% of the circulation (Islam, 2020). Bangladesh Protidin is the highest circulated newspaper (553,300 copies) in Bangladesh followed by Prothom Alo (501,800 copies). Other newspapers like- Ittefaq, Kaler Kantha, and Jugantor have more or less the same circulation rate (290,200 copies) in 2020. The Daily Star claims almost 55,000 copies are sold every day and the second highest is a business daily, Financial Express with 39,000 copies (Islam, 2020).

The transition to a digital platform has transformed how individuals utilize and consume information (Simukanga, Nyirenda & Kalumbilo-Kabemba, 2018). However, for a country like Bangladesh, which is considered as a developing country, ICT infrastructure, facility and the Internet penetration and literacy, costing of technology (hardware and software) are important for development decisions to be made (Kalombe & Phiri, 2019).

The two top Bengali newspapers are Prothom Alo and Bangladesh Protidin, and they jointly have a circulation of around one million copies across the entire nation (Prothom Alo: 22 March 2022). Data posted on the website of the Information Ministry show that Bangladesh Protidin has the biggest daily circulation with 553,300 copies, followed by Prothom Alo with 501,800 copies (Prothom Alo: 22 March 2022).

According to information on the ministry website, three additional newspapers—Jugantor, KalerKantha, and Dainik Ittefaq—have the same circulation of 290,200 copies. Once more, the daily circulation is lower in reality than in numbers. The Daily Star has a 44,814 circulation, according to the ministry's website.

There are a few popular local publications. The Daily Azadi, published in the port city, has the greatest circulation outside of the capital city with 27,000 copies. Daily Karatoa and Daily Purbadesh each have a circulation of 14,000 copies, while Dainik Purbanchal has a circulation of 15,000 copies.

According to Mohammad Hasan Mahmud, Information Minister of Bangladesh, Bangladesh had around 1,277 daily newspapers in February 2020. And 346 online newspapers have been registered from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, including 162 online news portals, 169 online portals of daily newspapers and 15 online portals of TV channels (Dhaka Tribune: January 30, 2023).

Matiur Rahman, Chief of Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB) and Editor of Prothom Alo, said in 2018, "Newspapers are losing readers globally to TV, online (media). Reduction of newspaper readers---Our estimates show that we have been losing readers at a rate of 5 to 10 percent in the past few years." After a year, Matiur Rahman also mentioned that the decline in circulation, readership and ad revenues followed the international trend because of television stations and online news portals (Islam, 2020).

The technological breakthrough in printing has brought in unforeseen structural change in the setup of print media. It has not only helped in better designing and lay out and more attractive presentation with improved color scheme in printing of the papers, but also made it feasible and economically viable to print more multi-edition copies faster and at lesser cost with better get up and attractive type (Khairuzzaman, 2017).

Bangladesh has seen an overall increase in the number of Internet and mobile phone users over time; according to BBS, family usage of mobile phones has increased by 9.7% over the past ten years, and Internet usage has increased by 33.3%, but the country's overall Internet user share is still only 38.9%. (The Daily Star: Dec 30, 2022; BBS, 2022). While about 63.1% of families believe they don't need the Internet, 48.2% believe the cost of Internet services prohibits them from using it (The Daily Star: Dec 30, 2022). Additionally, the BBS (2022) poll discovered a significant disparity between urban and rural households utilizing the internet; just 29.7% of rural households use the Internet, compared to 63 percent of urban households. The biggest discovery from BBS is the difference in Internet usage by region: whereas 54.2 percent of families in Dhaka utilize the Internet, only 19.7 percent do so in Rajshahi. (The Daily Star: Dec 30, 2022).

In 2020, the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) carried out a study styled "Digital Literacy in Rural Bangladesh". The study portrayed pictures of the prevailing state of digital literacy in rural Bangladesh and revealed that 96 percent of rural families owned a mobile phone, while a majority (59 percent) did not have access to a smartphone which is a prerequisite for availing of digital services (Hossain, 2022).

According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund and the Education Commission of Bangladesh, 84.9% of the youth, aged 15–24 years, lack the necessary digital skills (New Age: July 14, 2022). The report unveils that three-fourths of about 30.9 million youth of the age group in Bangladesh do not have the required digital skills, which refers to the ability at using and understanding technology and performing basic computer-related activities (Hossain, 2022). On the digital skills, Bangladeshi youths are behind Bhutan (68.5 per cent), Sri Lanka (70.6 per cent) and India (73.1) but ahead of Nepal (87.4 per cent) and Pakistan (90.2 per cent) in South Asia (NewAge: July 14,2022).

Moreover, people's dreams of utilizing the Internet at high expenses are out of reach when they are trying to keep up with the rising cost of life (Bay, 2022). It seems to reason that Bangladeshi rural residents use the Internet significantly less frequently than urban residents. This is why millions of people were left behind when the educated, middle-class, and upwardly mobile went into a turbo mode of digitization during the pandemic. Students in villages, especially those in distant locations without Internet, smartphones, or even TV, were not able to participate in remote learning through the Internet. As a result, the advantages of the digital revolution continued to be very skewed and to favor a very small portion of the population. (Amin, 2022)

Moreover, slow servers, poor Internet speed, as well as disruptive practices are some of the common challenges facing by industries in Bangladesh who are trying to adapt with digitization (The Daily Star: July 14, 2022). People are therefore not benefiting to their fullest potential. Although the majority of beneficiaries are supportive of the drive toward digitalization, they are dealing with a variety of issues. The websites through which the services can be requested are either not updated frequently, the services are no longer available due to a lack of trained labor, the user interfaces are too complex, or the servers frequently go down (Sarkar, 2022). All of this results in delays and frequently rising service charges.

The Bangladesh government has also introduced the process of "Registration for Online News-portal" for the newspapers under the National Online Media Policy-2017 (Amended-2020), considering the importance of digital platforms (Khan, 2020). The Bangladesh government has approved more than a hundred online news portals, including online editions of the newspaper. However, when people read e-newspaper, their expectation is not just reading the articles, but much more, like videos, talk shows. Unfortunately, the government rules are not supporting this. After a meeting with the leaders of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) at the Secretariat on 8th June 2022, The Information Minister Hasan Mahmud said the newspapers in their declaration were not allowed to hold talk-shows and show videos on their websites. Streaming news through IPTVs also goes against the government's policy. The Editors' Council said it thinks that the advancement of newspapers lies in the combination of print and digital platforms because the newspaper industry is globally facing new challenges due to the digital revolution (The Daily Star: June 11, 2022). Therefore, it is now necessary for the daily newspapers to present news interpretation, analysis, research and opinions through online or social media. This is how the scope for creating any debate over presenting digital contents in the online platforms of the newspapers in Bangladesh is limited.

In practically all of Bangladesh's major cities, prestigious dailies are now published online. Even many weekly news publications, including Newsweek, have long since ceased printing their print editions. However, any significant change of the sector into the digital version has yet to occur naturally, much to the relief of the owners of print media and newspaper readers. The primary cause of it could be attributed to the general public's dislike of online newspapers. (Sarkar, 2022).

The print media continues to have sway, and conventional media is essential for forming opinions despite growing difficulties and a downward trend in readership. Many people still rely on print newspapers for news and information, both in urban and rural locations. Print newspapers are still alive and well in Bangladesh, despite circulation substantially declining as it has in the west.

METHODOLOGY

With qualitative data analysis, this research conducted data collection techniques through in-depth interviews with 60 people with three different age groups and from nine cities in Bangladesh. Collecting qualitative data in the field, it is necessary to determine active informants who have insight, feelings, and cooperation related to the topic of a process discussion process to reveal subjective meanings (Djamba & Neuman, 2002). This is why purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample. Purposive sampling provides the opportunity to identify and select individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano Clark 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015). In addition to knowledge and experience, as mentioned by Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979), it is also important to have willingness of participation along with the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.

Among 60 people, 20 are Undergraduate and Masters students (age 20-30), 20 are middle aged professionals (age 30-50) and 20 are 50-65 aged people. So, all the respondents are educated however from different age groups and from different geographic locations (Dhaka, Chittagong, Bogra, Cumilla, Rajshahi and Khulna) in Bangladesh.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Triangulation method was used in this study to collect data. It is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). According to Noble and Heale (2019), research triangulation refers to the process that helps to increase the credibility and validity of research. In other words, research triangulation basically aims at validating the results of a study. Making use of multiple data sources reduces research biases in sampling, procedural bias as well as researcher biases thus increasing validity and credibility (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021; Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011).

According to Yin (2015), there are six types of evidence that can be used in case studies: written materials, oral histories, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. In this study, the instruments of data collection come from three sources: in-depth semi-structured interviews, archive records, and document analysis (historical documents, newspaper clippings). This increases the trustworthiness of the research, as data can be cross-checked from at least three sources.

Denzin (1970) has identified multiple triangulations as: methodological triangulation, where multiple methods are used to collect data; data triangulation, where a variety of data sources are used in terms of person, time, and space investigator triangulation, whereby multiple researchers are employed to investigate the problem; and theoretical triangulation, which enables varied perspectives and hypotheses. For this study, data and methodological triangulations have been employed, collecting data from different sources and using multiple methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, archive records and document analysis.

This study used semi-structured in-depth interviews. Semi-structured in-depth interviews, according to academics, are the only source of data for qualitative researchers (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews, which are typically semi-structured, allow the researcher to intervene as needed and make sure the participant is aware of the issue or question being examined. Additionally, interviewers get to put their interpersonal skills to use as they probe important concerns brought up by the subject, elements essential to thorough data gathering. (Stuckey, 2013). Despite having a set of guiding questions, the researcher can pose questions that are more in-depth than those that were initially planned based on the subject's response.

There are many methods for conducting qualitative interviews that are suitable as a tool for data collecting. Interviews were taken through face-to face, email and phone calls for this study. Notes taking was used for phone calls and face-to face interviews as recording was not allowed. According to Jackle, Roberts, & Lynn (2006), face to face and telephone interviews tend to be the most utilized techniques. Besides, messenger and e-mail interviews are a growing method for interviewing (Opdenakker, 2006). Additionally, Skype and other audio-visual technological platforms automatically extend in-person interviews (Sullivan, 2013).

METHOD FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis method was used to analyze the data for this study. It is a type of qualitative analysis which is used to analyze classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data. (Boyatzis 1998). Researchers can extend beyond formulating clear phrases or statements or conveying their thoughts by using thematic analysis, which allows them to code and categorize data into themes (Hatch 2002; Creswell 2003; Crawford et al. 2008).

This qualitative study used three moderators (age, habit, and digital literacy) and antecedents (cost, Internet penetration, digital inclusion, news trustworthiness and quality of connection) that could measure the preferences and acceptance level of consumers/readers for e-newspaper. Some themes were formed from the interview answers based on which the data analysis was done. These themes do indicate the behavioral patterns of e-newspaper readers which helps this study to answer the research questions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Information technology (IT) product is expected to be well received by users although there are conditions and circumstances that trigger these acceptance levels (Mun, et al., 2006). Technology Acceptance Model is one of various models to describe and forecast how IT products will be used. Davis (1989) defines TAM as one of the models created to examine and comprehend the variables influencing the acceptance of the usage of computer technology.

This model was developed to describe the context of user acceptance of an information system. As this study aims to investigate the acceptance level of e-newspaper reading in Bangladesh, this TAM Model seems appropriately relatable. According to this model, a system use is a response that can be explained or predicted by user motivation, which, in turn, is directly influenced by an external stimulus consisting of the actual system's features and capabilities. To classify technology acceptance concept three conditions must be met as users' motivation can be explained by three factors: Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU), Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Attitude Toward Using the system (ATU). The attitude of user, in turn, was influenced by two major beliefs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, with perceived ease of use having a direct influence on perceived usefulness. According to Davis (1985), people tend to use or not to use a system to the extent that they believe it will help them perform their job better (perceived usefulness), and that the beliefs of the efforts required to use a system can directly affect system usage behavior (perceived ease of use).

The degree to which a user thinks utilizing a specific system would be easy is called perceived ease of use (PEOU). According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness (PU) is the degree to which a person thinks that using a certain strategy or technique would improve his or her job performance or regular responsibilities. Behavioral intention to use (BIU) is influenced by both attitudes toward usage (ATU) and perceived utility (PU). The actual use of a specific system is determined by behavioral intention to use, which also impacts technology adoption. PEOU has indirect effects on BIU as well PEOU. While AU is directly influenced by PEOU, both PU and PEOU have an impact on PEOU. According to some studies, with TAM, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are positively related with attitude and intention to use (Everett, 2011; Park & Angel, 2013). An individual's behavior intentions determine his or her actual behavior. Behavior intention is in turn determined by the individual's attitude toward this behavior and subjective norms with regard to the performance of this behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). This assumes that individuals are rational decision-makers who constantly calculate and evaluate the relevant behavior beliefs in the process of forming their attitude toward the behavior (Li, 2010).

Moreover, external variables can be considered that might influence the beliefs of a person towards a system. (Venkatesh & Davis, 1996). Some researchers introduce external variables or moderating factors to the two major belief constructs (perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use), such as personality traits and demographic characteristics (Gefen and Straub, 1997; Venkatesh, 2000; Venkatesh and Morris, 2000).

PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

For this study, the author considered two socio demographic moderators¹ as age and geographical location and four antecedents² as cost, digital literacy, news trustworthiness and quality of connection while looking at the e-newspaper acceptance level for Bangladeshi readers. We know from the TAM Model that an individual's behavioral intention determines his/her actual behavior where perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are positively related in order to create the intention for an actual behavior. For this study to answer the research question each of the four antecedents here has linear relationship with perceived ease of reading e-newspapers. The antecedents used in this study are: Internet cost that talks about the cost that consumers need to pay to access Internet; hardware cost that talks about the cost that customers incur to buy technology such as smartphones and laptops; news trustworthiness talks about how trustworthy the news are; quality of connection (uninterrupted, smooth); and digital literacy which means an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information through typing and other media on various digital platforms. Moreover, the two moderating factors as age and geographical location have been used here. Three different age groups of people were considered from different geographical locations (urban and suburban areas).

¹ Moderator is a variable that modifies the relationship between the independent variable (antecedent) and the dependent variable (outcome). By including moderators in a model, researchers can more accurately predict the outcome and understand the underlying mechanisms that drive the relationship between the antecedents and outcomes.

² Antecedents refer to the variables or factors that are thought to cause or influence the outcome of interest.

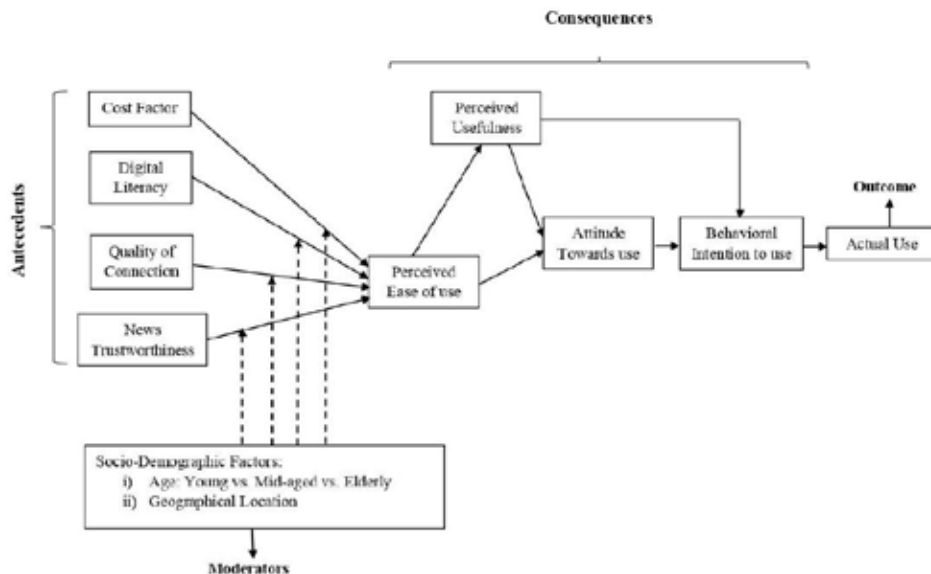


Figure 1.1: Theoretical Framework (Proposed by the author)

Here, quality of Internet connection, digital literacy, and news trust worthiness are positively related to perceived ease of e-newspaper reading whereas the cost (cost of Internet connection and hardware) is negatively related to perceived ease of e-newspaper reading. Besides, two moderators as age and geographical location can change the relationship (strengthen/weaken) between the four antecedents and the outcome which is perceived ease of reading e-newspapers. The interview questions are set based on the factors related to the theory used in this study to explain the scenario so it can answer the research questions.

FINDINGS

As we know from the proposed model, to achieve the perceived ease of reading e-newspaper. An individual has to have digital literacy, good quality of Internet connection, bear the cost of Internet connection and devices he or she uses, and should be satisfied with the news trustworthiness. For this study, the two moderators as age and geographical location do indicate strong influence on the antecedents' level of impacting the perceived ease of reading e-newspapers. For instance, when we considered the first moderating variable, age, we had three different age groups as young (mostly

students), middle-aged (professionals), and elderly generation. And these three group of people were from nine different geographical locations (cities of Bangladesh). They are from Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Bogura, Sylhet, Sirajganj, and Faridpur.

From the interviews with young aged respondents, out of 20, 10 were from urban areas (Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet) and 10 were from sub-urban cities (Rangpur, Sirajganj, Faridpur, Bogura). Interestingly, all 20 respondents have digital literacy. However, respondents from urban areas think the cost to bear the Internet connection and the device are quite affordable. Also, the Internet connection seems quite smooth for them. On the other hand, young respondents from sub-urban areas think the Internet connection speed not good and the cost is high for them. One of the respondents A6 from Rangpur said, "The Internet connection is vulnerable. So, reading while moving is troublesome." Besides, the respondents from both urban and sub-urban areas seem quite skeptical about the news-trustworthiness of e-newspapers. One of the respondents A14 opined, "Most of the news headlines look manipulative. The actual article is different from what is mentioned in the headline." According to another respondent, A43 "I do not go to newspaper portal to access news information. I only read the articles when the news appears on my social media wall and I only read the news that seem interesting to me. "One of the respondents A31 from Dhaka city opined, "I find it easy to read news online. Some of the content seems interesting to me. I don't have to carry a newspaper in hand. A mobile phone is an all-purpose solver for a day." Among the 10 respondents from sub-urban areas, 7 still prefer to read printed newspapers as they think printed newspaper contents are more authentic and its convenient to keep and store at home. Besides, one student stated "like most of the people of my age, I too prefer browsing Facebook over reading newspapers. I don't use online platforms to read news. Television is a good source for news."

Moreover, among the 20 middle-aged respondents from urban and sub-urban areas (working in government and private organizations), all are professionals and so are digitally literate. Where urban area middle-aged professionals think e-newspapers are easy and convenient to read. The sub-urban professionals think printed newspapers give them more comfort and convenience of reading. About the quality of connection and cost, the urban professionals opined positively. One of the respondents A3 stated, "Internet connection and mobile device are everything we need the whole day for daily communication and any type of information access. But, the broadband connectivity should be smoother." On the other hand, one of the interviewees A21 from sub-urban areas said, "We are still comfortable with print newspapers as it doesn't require a device so cost is minimum and quality of connection does not matter." Another respondent A32 said, "We are bombarded with news from multiple sources on a daily basis. Sometimes, it's not required to look into e-newspaper links. We get to know what's happening around from TV or printed newspaper."

Furthermore, among the 20 elderly aged respondents, 18 from urban and sub-urban areas do not have digital literacy and still prefer television news and printed newspapers for getting the knowledge of

current affairs. Only 2 from Dhaka city are digitally literate who supported e-newspaper reading. One of the respondents A46 said, “We are more used to reading printed form of newspaper and this is my habit and comfort. The e-newspapers seem less trustworthy to me.” Another respondent A1 said, “People around my age are not yet familiar with technology. So, we neither can be comfortable nor interested to learn about anything related to digital device. According to one more respondent A39, “Usually at this age, we have issues with our vision and learning technology is another hassle. So, I find using a device to read news to be costly and waste of energy. I already have an option available which is printed newspaper.” Another 55 old government service holder A27 said “it is difficult for some people to adjust to technological changes. Sometimes I want to keep a particular news, but don’t know how to do it with e-news. Also, it is indeed difficult to read the news through mobile on small screens.” Respondent A32 said, “I do read e-newspaper links when I browse Facebook but I also read traditional printed newspaper as I feel the printed one has more credibility.”

DISCUSSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The socio-economic and gradual dominance of technology is causing a transition from print newspapers to e-newspapers. As a result, as more people turn to social media sites as news providers, the actual space for news is getting less. The usage of mobile phones to access radio and broadcast media as well as phone-in and text-in services has revolutionized how users interact with the media, according to a 2012 research from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. In both wealthy and developing nations, this technological revolution has given customers a constant source of news and entertainment (Kalombe & Phiri, 2019). According to Sparano & Takashi (2010), the percentage of conventional newspapers being read online is rising. Globally, the use of social networks and social media is growing quickly. According to the same study, people filter, evaluate, and respond to news using social networks and social networking technology. Because of convergence, newspapers now have the ability to produce contents that integrate many multimedia components (such as text, images, audio, video, graphics, social networks, etc.) and distribute it across several media platforms (Sparano & Takashi, 2010). Most of the national newspapers have added their online news portals in Bangladesh. However, the printed version is still very much visible. Although the printed newspaper circulation shrunk during the pandemic, its visibility is back in use. Yes, the digital natives specially the young generation are not big fans of print newspapers. But their share in the print newspaper readership is still very low. While access to mobile phones has been increasing worldwide, Bangladesh continues to have one of the lowest levels of Internet connectivity in Asia, at 38.9% total Internet users and this is mostly from urban areas. From the above findings, it can be said that because of the rise of online usage, advertisers are putting more money on digital platforms, and therefore enforcing the newspaper companies to emphasize more on e-newspapers than print newspapers. In that case, the print newspapers should find ways to be more creative content-wise in order to ensure their smooth survival. But are e-newspapers being a big threat for print newspapers yet?

Limitations of e-newspaper reading

The results showed that perceived ease of reading digital newspapers affects consumers in meeting the need for information more effectively and faster for the younger generation. According to the interviews, the young respondents do scroll e-news while checking their social media accounts whereas middle-aged professionals prefer both versions, and the aged generation clearly is comfortable with printed newspapers. Young and busy people find it more conducive to engaging in an online newspaper subscription, which is cheap and offers more information. Besides, while reading online contents, people may click on other links, which leads to additional stories and news.

The interviews do confirm that digital disruption is causing changes among people's habits. However, people of Bangladesh in general are not yet totally ready for the digital transition for reading newspapers. With the increasing penetration of smartphones, the Internet, and social media platforms, the popularity of e-newspapers has been steadily increasing among school and university-going students all across the country. However, the technology is yet to capture the high-end market and has largely overlooked the low-end markets. Besides, the majority of sub-urban people and the elderly generation in general is not digitally literate to adapt to new changes. In fact, middle-aged people are not yet a great fan of e-paper contents; they in fact expect better. Quality of Internet connection has been a common complaint from the respondents both from younger and middle-aged respondents who did reveal their frustrations. The interviews also confirmed that the respondents are skeptical about the credibility of e-newspapers. Most of them still think that the accountability attached to print newspapers is much higher and the content of the news is more reliable.

From the results of this study can be concluded that some users who are already tech-friendly, can afford to buy gadgets, have seamless Internet connectivity are e-paper readers. The frequency of use will probably rise in the future if these individuals tend to keep reading digital newspapers. Besides, if the bottlenecks like high cost of Internet, disruptive connectivity, unaffordable devices, non-inclusiveness of Internet connectivity can be overcome, that can improve the Internet penetration rate of the country and then e-newspaper readers will increase automatically. Therefore, to increase the e-newspaper readers, these factors have to be taken care of.

Some respondents already expressed their frustration stating that spreading misinformation is quite easy to put on online platforms. Also, online platforms often put up unnecessary news that lacks proper research and investigation only to increase interactions with its customer base. In addition, comment sections on websites and social media channels invite misdemeanor and cyberbullying whereas print newspapers have a one-way communication which prevents misdemeanor and cyber-bullying in public. In order to improve this scenario in favor of e-newspaper reading, newspaper companies have to focus on this credibility perception.

Habits and convenience of print newspapers

From the above discussion, it can be said that digital transformation of newspaper readership has not taken place yet in Bangladesh. Because digital literacy and readiness are quite limited among the newspaper readers of Bangladesh. Till date, more than half population use printed/traditional newspapers/broadcast media (TV/Radio) for news. On the other hand, there is still a lot to be done to make the e-newspapers a good piece of reading because of the Internet quality, cost to bear, and the content. Although the evolution of technology and hardware like smartphones, have made access and reading news relatively easy, compared to reading print newspapers, print newspapers still have demand in places like households, office receptions, restaurants, coffee shops, salons, and banks as a major source of entertainment, comfort, and convenience. Yes, the demands for physical media outlets like magazines and newspapers have declined, but people still read newspapers. Having a portable physical copy of something is quite desirable for people who enjoy reading. Like a book, people can take newspapers wherever they go and read at their own pace.

Although the Internet penetration rate is increasing in the suburban and rural markets, the rate is quite low and so people are still not comfortable with the concept of reading news online and rather watching news on television or keeping the hardcopies of the newspaper. Currently, the local newspapers of Bangladesh mostly focus on Metropolitan city people as e-newsreaders. This how the distrust towards e-newspapers still is an integral opportunity for print newspapers to dominate the market.

The online news platforms have the urgency to become first to publish news over the accuracy of news. Eventually, when the news turns out to be false, the online platforms can easily delete the news which print newspapers cannot. News on print newspapers get published after thorough research and accuracy checks because they exist as evidence, as cited by the respondents in our interviews. As a result, print newspapers have more credibility than e-newspapers.

Co-existence of print and e-newspapers as a solution

True that almost every established Bangla and English newspapers in Bangladesh has significant online presence and has adopted the potential disruption early into its lifecycle. Even then, none of the interviewees supported the idea of e-newspapers completely replacing print newspapers. In fact, many of them mentioned that although digitally literate people are getting used to with e-newspaper links. However, print newspapers are deeply embedded into Bangladeshi culture and people's habit, and so cannot be completely phased out any time soon. As of 2022, both printed and e-newspapers are co-existing in Bangladesh because only 38.9% of the total population of Bangladesh has Internet connection for which rest of the population obviously accessing other sources for news such as television, radio, and print newspaper.

As digital transformation is the trend now for any act. So, e-newspapers can eradicate the limitations to improve the e-newspaper reading habits and its convenience. It is quite clear that countries like

Bangladesh will take time to adopt technology for the mass. To make the scenario better, printed newspapers can focus on keeping variations in news contents while considering the young generation preferences in mind so they read it beside the elderly generation and suburban middle-aged people do prefer printed newspapers. Additionally, like some of the newspapers already following a hybrid solution to it while keeping both e-version and printed version for newspaper, others can follow the same. This is how, both e-newspapers and print newspapers can exist as available options and can serve the nation together.

There is still plenty that needs to be done and changed. The closure of the digital divide, enhancing Internet penetration, and fortifying broadband networks are top priorities. But the issues hindering its digitalization initiative should be quickly fixed by the government. Making the Internet accessible to everyone and lowering the cost of essential gadgets will go a long way toward promoting digital activity among our population. Without the proper training, people will not be able to fully realize the benefits from ICT. The success of doing so will determine the future.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has used TAM model to develop an understanding on whether Bangladeshi people are accepting e-newspapers totally or allowing a co-existence with print newspapers, and why so. This model helped to understand how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two most important empirics about using an information technology, in this case e-newspapers. These two then lead to individual behavior intention and ultimately actual behavior of reading e-newspapers. According to the findings of this study, some readers who find e-newspapers easy, affordable, and convenient read that whereas some readers consider printed newspapers the same way. For Bangladesh's case, the external factors that are antecedents to create e-newspaper readers are digital literacy, cost of Internet and devices, quality of connection, and news trustworthiness. The acceptance level of e-newspapers in Bangladesh is growing, but there are still some barriers to widespread adoption. However, with the increasing availability of Internet access and the increasing trend towards digital media consumption, the acceptance of e-newspapers is likely to increase in the future.

The current scenario suggests that the print newspapers still carry more credibility over e-newspapers. The young generation has developed or been born into a technological age though. But it has been seen after observation that most of the readers are young and usually around 25 years of age. The online newspapers publish some news to attract those readers which have very less news value. But they often avoid important news or publish these lightly. The news about important national and international issues is often overshadowed by the news about scandals, crimes and entertainment. Sometimes news becomes attractive photo and headline-based. Many readers feel cheated after reading news attracted by showy headlines.

On the other hand, people aged 25 plus have reported frequent usage of a print newspaper. Dissimilarity between headline and news story in online newspaper is found very common response from them.

Another negative thing is giving priority to velocity than accuracy. Many online newspaper portals seem to forget that the authentication of news is very important. Some online news based on rumors which proved not authentic at a time. Perverted or partly true information is also published. Publishing news without authentication of information is contradictory with the ethics of journalism. This kind of negative journalism is creating a very bad impression about news, journalists and journalism among the common people gradually. As such, everything depends on how one is using the technology. Unfortunately, the negative use of technology has complicated the situation. However, there are some good online newspapers in Bangladesh which have gained the confidence of the readers by publishing neutral and quality news. Nevertheless, the low digital literacy rate in Bangladesh is another dominant factor here for which the relevance of print newspapers will not fade away anytime soon. The co-existence of both printed and e-newspapers would be a way to satisfy newspaper consumers in a holistic manner.

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