

THE NEWS CONSUMPTION TRENDS AMONG DIGITAL NATIVES

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Abstract: The largescale proliferation of internet has revolutionised the news consumption behaviour of people. Nowadays news consumption mainly takes place in the digital medium. This changing trend could be gauged by an increasing number of print newspapers shifting to online mediums to deliver news. As transformation to the digital medium happens at a phenomenally faster phase, this study focuses on factors effecting the change among digital natives. Digital natives refer a generation grown up acclimatised to the use of digital technologies. The researches done so far has been more or less limited to news consumption through traditional media like new paper, television and radio. So, this research investigated the news consumption behaviour of the digital natives through qualitative approach. For the purpose of the study, a set of questions were prepared and responses collected from college students, as they represent digital natives. The study looked into aspects like accessibility, cost factors, time spent and easiness to use a digital media to consume news. The findings of the research indicate that there is a growing popularity for digital news delivery mediums. The respondents accorded top priority for easy to access and convenience for choosing an online news medium. This research has shown that youth spend a considerable time to get their daily dose of news through social media and mobile platforms. The payment options for consuming news through digital medium depends on the individual. Taking these factors into consideration, the research suggests that traditional media companies should gear up to serve better the emerging segment of digital natives.

Keywords: Digital natives, internet, news consumption.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet has transformed the news consumption habits of people, Szekely and Nagy (2011) from traditional source of news consumption through print newspapers, the present generation has moved over to digital medium to consume news. News consumption mostly happens online for digital natives.

Digital natives refer to a generation born after 1980s and grown up using digital technologies for sourcing information. While the shift has been rather faster in developed European countries, India too is fast catching up with the trend towards a digital medium.

Thus far, researches Huang (2009), Szekely and Nagy (2011) and (Qayyum et al.2010), were done in ample to study the news consumption habits of people related to old media. It is generally perceived that the digital generation has largely drifted away from the traditional media to consume news by the digital medium. Largescale penetration of internet too has aided in the easy access of news through social media like face book, twitter, news apps, you tube and other online mediums.

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

This research is meant to investigate the news consumption habits among digital natives through online medium. Previous researches have focused mostly on the news consumption trends in European nations. They found youth to have gone digital favouring its speed in news updates and convenience. Both mobile and social media play a pivotal role in delivering news to the digital natives. However it becomes pertinent to study in detail of a trend in local context to gauge the news consumption patterns among digital natives.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:

The aim of this study is to investigate the changing news consumption trends among digital natives. It is generally perceived that lives of youth are crafted out by digital technologies (Lee & Delli Carpini, 2010) based on their need for news consumption.

This research is focused on studying what interests in a news, reasons for the shift towards digital medium and dislikes of the digital natives. The study would strive to understand the preference for digital news sources among the digital natives.

In this context, the news consumption habits of youngsters will be investigated for a better understanding of the media market. The study may help in evolving better strategies for ailing media firms to shore up readership by surviving odds.

2. METHODOLOGY

To find out the news preferences of the digital era, the investigation was carried out on a qualitative method. Data were gathered by in-depth interviews among respondents comprising college students as they constitute a new generation of digital natives. They were chosen for the study as the present day youth had access to both traditional and new media.

To study the news preferences of digital natives, a set of fixed questions were handed out to youth. The respondents were given a short briefing on the purpose of the study and were convinced to spare their time for the resourceful study. The researched made them to understand how the outcome of the study would have deeper impact on the news companies to fight out odds to be in business.

As said, the research came out with interesting findings that digital natives are dependent on mobile and social media for their news requirements. And the consumers never mind paying for the news served on the online platform. But their willingness to pay has come with a rider. That is, the news should be more catchy, delivered fast and up-to date. The subscribers are also willing to pay for news of their interests, which could be on sports, politics and entertainment.

The pay for option may in-turn trigger the growth of ailing newspaper industry suffering from falling revenues through declining advertisements. The study may help newspapers to evolve better strategies to keep the newspapers alive and kicking besides stay abreast with developments.

Theoretical contributions:

The study reveals that digital medium remains a vital platform to deliver news. A majority of respondents have stated that they follow news online, while only a minuscule number of respondents stated of having consumed news through traditional news sources like newspapers. Backing up this is the study by Szekely and Nagy (2011), whose research says that news consumption happens more and more through digital medium.

According to Chan-Olmstead et al. (2012), the individual characteristics define the nature of youth moving over from traditional media to new media. A similar view point can be seen in this research as the respondents have revealed to be still dependent on traditional media like television for their daily news consumption.

This study also echoes a finding by Castellon (2012) that youth are dependent on different media for their news requirements. Youth had different news sources and weren't dependent on a single news platform to keep themselves updated on the current affairs. The respondents of the study get news through different platforms such as face book, what's app, you tube, television and newspapers based on their requirements.

Prior studies have revealed that youth are highly dependent on social media to consume news (Castellon, 2012). Similarly the study by Crittenden, Keo and McCarthy (2012) made out that, of the different social media news sources, Facebook stands a cut above others as a preferred medium for youth.

This study too has confirmed the above findings that youngsters are increasingly moving towards social media for their news consumption. Of them, face book is the most preferred medium among the respondents of this research.

Data collection:

Data collection was done through interview method as suggested in qualitative research. As part of the study, a set of well-prepared questions were presented to the respondents. The interviewees were extended with a privilege to give out their detailed response in their own sense (Eskola & Suoranta, 1999, 86).

In Qualitative approach, the researcher makes it out to express the views of the respondents (Cassell & Symon, 2004, 11). Also the respondents were chosen from the generation born after 1982 (Ricketts, 2009).

All the interviewees were chosen to be college students to maintain the same age group to understand news consumption behaviour of the youth. An almost equal number of male and female respondents were selected for a fairer outcome of the study. Fifty students were interviewed in total for the study.

News Consumption:

The results of the study reveal that youth of the present generation are hooked to news. However their news consumption varied based on their area of interest and field of specialisation.

A respondent was interested in educational and political content, while another respondent was inclined towards global developments and on sports related content. Another respondent, who is pursuing a masters in Visual Communication said, "I like entertainment news. I love to read mostly movie related news like updates on film releases, actors to be cast and film awards."

Most of the respondents shared a commonality in their source of access for news consumption as they all looked towards internet for news consumption. The study reveals a tremendous shift among youngsters in accessing news as they have moved over from the traditional media to the new media.

Only a few respondents followed news through television, while a majority of them replied that they turned on to new mediums like what's app, you tube and facebook for news. None of them followed news by radio, which in yesteryears ruled the roost in delivering news on current affairs to the masses.

News Sources:

The study suggests that youth followed news from a variety of media platforms and most preferred among them was social media. News consumption was mainly through mobile as it is easy to access and can be read anywhere and anytime.

One of the respondents said that he preferred knowing news through face book and you tube. "I like to know current affairs by watching videos more than reading a news, be it from any medium."

This statement gains significance with the popular opinion that reading habit among youngsters has been on the decline. Nevertheless the 'dying' news paper industry too should brace itself to serve the new age news consumers by embracing technology. For the respondents, the easiness to access plays a main criteria for their choice of medium.

In all, the study revealed that most of the respondents consumed news through digital medium. Only a few respondents said that they still rely on traditional news sources like newspaper to get their daily dose of news.

Time spent on digital media:

The study indicates that youngsters spend a considerable time in digital technologies. A number of respondents said that they follow news on a daily basis, even though their choice for news differed based on their area of interest.

One of the respondents revealed of following news to a maximum of two hours on a daily basis. But not many had such keenness to follow news for a longer time as majority of others consumed news only for less than an hour. It varied from 15 minutes to upto one hour.

Payment for news consumption:

The respondents stood divided in their opinion on paying for online news consumption. Many of the respondents said that it's okay if the charge levied is bare minimal.

"There is nothing wrong if the organisation collects a service charge for delivering news online. Nevertheless the media companies should charge only a minimum cost from news consumers," said one of the respondent.

Echoing a similar view, another respondent said, "Online news service can be charged. But the cost should be maintained less than the cost of print newspapers. It can then be an added advantage for both the organisations and consumers as more people will then access it."

Their positive attitude towards paying for online news consumption culminates through their understanding on the need for revenue for media companies to stay in this highly competitive business.

Several other respondents also shared a common view that news is meant to be delivered free and shouldn't be charged in this information era. One of the respondent expressed that charging for news may divide the people in terms of their knowledge.

“Chargeable nature of online news could create a division among the public or community.

The one who can pay will remain more updated with news than those who couldn't pay for news consumption. News now becomes an option for people,” he said.

Another woman respondent said that people should be allowed to pay only for the internet connectivity. “No extra charge should be collected by media firms for news service. People should be allowed to pay only for internet connection.”

3. DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate the news consumption trends among youngsters, who constitute the community of digital natives. There is a common perception that today's youngsters are more inclined towards digital media for their daily dose of news. This is what the researcher aims to investigate, if there is any significant shift towards the digital media for news consumption.

The study is also focused on how the youth consume news and does the social media a play a role in delivering news. The research also had interesting findings on the time spent by digital natives in digital media to consume news.

The approach towards payment options for access to digital media was revealed in the study. Such findings may play an important role in devising strategies by media companies to charge for their online content and develop models that would better serve the requirements of the youth.

NEWS CONSUMPTION FACTORS OF DIGITAL NATIVES:

This study has clearly confirmed the findings of previous researches that easiness and accessibility play a vital role in defining the news consumption habits of youth.

Quick accessibility (Zerba, 2011) and up to date updates are the main factors that determine the choice of a new media. According to Coombes (2009), youth prefer a medium which is easy to use and fast in delivery of news.

This is a common criteria for any news delivery mediums to stay afloat in the competitive market as youth no longer have the time and patience to consume news leisurely at homes. The respondents of the study have expressed their desire to remain up to date on current affairs, yet for them the news consumption has to be in an effortless manner regardless of their location and time.

The Pew Research Centre for the People and Press (2012) suggests that an increasing number of people are dependent on mobile for knowing news. Their preference for mobile based media comes in the wake of its quick accessibility and easy to use (Chan-Olmsted et al, 2012). According to Huang (2009), consuming news via mobile medium was a convenient option for youth as they carry it along anytime.

PRICE DETERMINATION FOR NEWS CONSUMPTION:

This current study suggests that many of the respondents opt for a news medium which is free of cost. The respondents have expressed their desire for the digital news media to remain cost free.

This is in line with the findings by Huang (2009), which suggested that youth did not want to pay for consuming news. However, there is also an attitude shift among the digital natives as they have expressed their willingness to pay for the media companies to stay in business.

On the whole, it can well be assumed that digital natives are ready to pay for news consumption provided that they are delivered with quality content in an interesting way.

4. CONCLUSION

The current study has given a valuable insight into the preference of digital natives in their news consumption behaviour. By analysing the results of the study, the newspaper companies can come out with strategies to cope up with losing audiences.

As online news mediums tend to rule the roost, the traditional news mediums should look at options to deliver news digitally catering to the need of digital natives. It is of utmost importance to make news consumption a pleasant experience by serving news that interests youth.

As youth lay greater weightage for on time update of current news, the media firms should look at quick delivery of news, which infact is likely to be a great challenge.

As far as the youth are concerned, the interest in a news is decided by the effect it has on their lives (Qayyum et al.2010). This study suggests that the interest for a news is more if it is based on their area of concern. Hence the media firms should consider customising news content based on the requirement of the young audience.

Limitations of the research:

One of the major limitations of the research is that the study is focused on youth and with a certain level of academic background. The research does not look into the news consumption of people in different ages, which can be considered an area of study in further researches in future. There can be studies to know if the digital media has made any profound effect on people in rural areas as they too constitute a majority of news consumers.

Also the study has been entirely focused on youth from Coimbatore. So there is scope for further research to know if demography influences the digital news consumption behaviour by choosing people from other localities as respondents.

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