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## Online News Displaces Print Newspaper: Media Students' Preferences and Perceptions

**Abstract:** *This study extends the uses and gratifications theory to explore the uses of general, time, daily, and weekly news. It also applies the theory of media displacement to investigate the ease, preference, emergency use, credibility perception, and confidence in forming opinions for news from print newspapers and online sources. A survey with 244 students from communication and media disciplines in Lahore's universities revealed that 68% of media students read news for only 30 minutes daily. 65% preferred daily updates and found it easier to access news online (62%). During emergencies, 79% relied on online news, but only 52% considered it authentic. Despite concerns about tree wastage, 67% favoured free access to online news, with only 33% willing to purchase print newspapers. This study supports the media displacement hypothesis, suggesting that online news is displacing print newspapers due to affordability, posing significant implications for newspaper management.*

**Key Words:** Online News, Newspaper, Students' Preferences, Students' Perceptions, Media Displacement

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### Introduction

The medium, technology, options, length, and various other factors differentiate print newspapers from online news. The historical backgrounds of these two forms of news delivery also exhibit dissimilarities. While online news is a relatively new technological advancement, print newspapers have long been utilized as a traditional method of

disseminating news across different locations. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2016), a newspaper is defined as a publication that encompasses news, opinions, features, and other content of public relevance, typically distributed on a daily, weekly, or regular basis, often accompanied by advertisements.

The Acta Durna, an ancient Roman publication focusing on political announcements, acted as a precursor to the

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modern newspaper (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)). Its inception dates back to around 131 BCE during the Roman Republic, primarily covering reports on legal proceedings and trial outcomes (Acta Diurna, [2016](#)). In the late Middle Ages, newsletters circulated among international traders, with notable contributions from the Fugger family of Augsburg (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)). During China's late Han dynasty (second and third centuries AD), government-produced news sheets known as Dibao were distributed among court officials. Moreover, the Chinese Tang Dynasty published the Kaiyuan Za Bao ("Bulletin of the Court") between 713 and 734, handwritten on silk and exclusively for government officials. Privately published news sheets made their debut in Beijing during the late Ming Dynasty in 1582 (Newspaper, 2016). These historical publications laid the foundation for the diverse and informative newspapers we have today.

Closely associated with specific topical events like battles or public celebrations, the concept of a printed newsbook or news pamphlet emerged in England. The earliest known instance, dating back to 1513, provided an eyewitness account of the English victory at the Battle of Flodden against the Scots. Other forerunners of newspapers included town criers, ballads, and broadsides (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)). As the early 17th century dawned, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands witnessed the emergence of more regular papers printed from movable type. Furthermore, rudimentary newspapers appeared in various European countries during the 17th century, while Japan published broadsheets featuring social news during the Tokugawa period (1603–1867) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)).

During the 1640s, newsbooks underwent a transformation into newspapers, with the omission of the title page. Nevertheless, it wasn't until 1771 that journalists were officially granted the right to report on parliamentary proceedings by the British Parliament. In 1785, John Walter established *The Times*, renowned for its exceptional quality and for pioneering a new era of journalism. *The Observer* followed suit in 1791

(Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)). However, progress in newspaper development in Germany was hindered by the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), and various forms of censorship were prevalent across Europe. It was only in 1766 that Sweden passed the first law safeguarding press freedom (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)).

France saw the launch of its first daily newspaper, the *Journal de Paris*, in 1771, while the *Journal des Débats* (1789) became a daily to cover the National Assembly's proceedings, continuing until World War II. The French Revolution led to a proliferation of newspapers, but their numbers declined significantly afterwards (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)). In the United States, the first newspaper, *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestic*, was published in Boston in September 1690 but was suppressed after a single issue by the colonial government. In 1704, the *Boston Newsletter* began its weekly publication under the postmaster's authority. The *Boston Gazette* (1719), printed by James Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's brother, emerged as another prominent publication. A significant milestone for press freedom came in 1735 with John Peter Zenger, a New York City newspaper publisher, being acquitted based on the argument that his political criticisms were factual. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1791) further solidified press freedom in the United States. During the early years of the republic, most newspapers demonstrated intense partisanship in the political clashes between the Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [2016](#)).

Newspapers continue to be widely distributed globally, offering diverse types and content tailored to specific countries, target audiences, and other factors. Online newspapers, whether as independent publications or digital versions of print periodicals, have opened up new opportunities for the industry. They can compete with broadcast journalism by delivering breaking news in a more timely manner. Established newspapers with strong brand recognition and credibility, along with their close relationships with advertisers, are

often seen as having better chances of survival in the industry. Additionally, transitioning away from the printing process can help reduce costs (Online Newspaper, 2016).

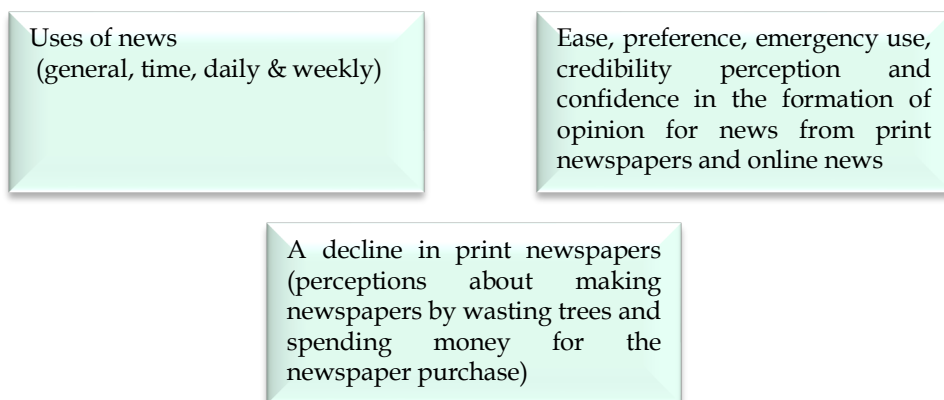
The concept of an online newspaper dates back to 1974, with Bruce Parrello creating one on the PLATO system at the University of Illinois. "News Report" stands as an early example of an "online only" newspaper or magazine. In 1987, the Brazilian newspaper *Jornaldodia* began operating on the state-owned Embratel network before transitioning to the Internet in the 1990s. By the late 1990s, several U.S. newspapers had launched online

editions. For instance, Britain's Weekend City Press Review offered a weekly news summary online from 1995 (Online Newspaper, 2016). Online news represents a relatively new technology, and continuous efforts are being made to enhance its quality.

The evolution of newspapers from print to online format has led to changes in perceptions and preferences among readers. This study examines how students studying communication and media studies (media studies) perceive and prefer the print version of newspapers compared to online news.

**Figure 1**

*Media Students' Preferences and Perceptions of Print Newspapers and Online News*



## Literature Review

Online computer databases offer a convenient and speedy method of searching through numerous newspapers for relevant articles and stories (Soothill & Grover, 1997). However, it is important to note that the majority of online news content is derived from print versions of newspapers (Yoo, 2003). Research findings indicate that online newspapers generally provide more news content, related articles, and longer headlines compared to their print counterparts. Furthermore, significant differences exist in terms of topics covered, geographical coverage, and news sources between the online and print versions (Yoo, 2003). The Internet is increasingly becoming a major platform for news dissemination, with many newspaper websites incorporating additional

news items from wire services. Some newspapers even publish exclusive news content solely on their online platforms due to economic and staffing constraints (Yoo, 2003).

A study focusing on young online newspaper readers suggests that their preference for the online edition often leads to reduced consumption of print newspapers (De Waal et al., 2005). However, it is important to recognize that online newspapers do not appear to entirely replace print newspapers or other news channels but rather complement them. Thus, the essential functions of print newspapers in society need not be a cause for concern (De Waal et al., 2005). Some young online newspaper readers may entirely forego reading the print edition (De Waal et al., 2005).

However, it is worth noting that students, who have grown up with technology, may

exhibit different and more advanced media habits and format preferences (Bucher & Schumacher, 2006). While a small group of users may consider online news media as a substitute for print news media, the majority view it as a complement (Ahlers, 2006). Bucher and Schumacher (2006) found that online news readers were less likely to recall national and political news topics compared to readers of traditional newspapers, but were more likely to recall business and other news topics. They also noted that both industry insiders and outsiders acknowledge the preference of young people for online news accessed through websites, social media, or mobile applications.

Despite speculation about mass migration from print news media to online platforms, a close analysis of industry data suggests that such a transition has not occurred to the extent that would lead to the collapse of print news media (Ahlers, 2006). Some users will indeed prefer online news, but there will always be individuals who continue to rely on print news media (Ahlers, 2006). Reading print newspapers contributes to a broader awareness of public events compared to using online newspapers (Bucher & Schumacher, 2006).

Internet access enables the receipt of news updates and provides free content (Patel, 2010). Publishers may need to discontinue print circulation entirely and shift to digital platforms to ensure the survival of newspapers in a paperless model (Patel, 2010). Kaufhold (2010) argues that newspapers should revise their digital strategies for students, as the main issue lies in their lack of interest in the news. In the United States, a survey found that 30% of respondents preferred reading news on the web, while 70% preferred the print format (Hsiang Iris Chyi & Lee, 2012). Another study concluded that the new generation of students, aged 18-22, has a preference for online news consumption (Chyi, 2013). Furthermore, research indicates that the Internet allows print media to provide more in-depth coverage of international stories (Dai, 2014), particularly in the case of Chinese media, where digital technologies have brought about changes in their coverage

of international news (Dai, 2014). Online news media have become an integral part of social, economic, and cultural life in technologically advanced societies (Uotila, 2016).

Notably, the younger demographic tends to obtain their news from social media platforms (Newman et al., 2019). In Norway, news avoidance has only marginally increased from 1997 to 2016, and it remains unclear to what extent online news consumption matches traditional news consumption in terms of quality (Karlsen et al., 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

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The present study builds upon the uses and gratifications theory and the media displacement theory and proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework to understand audience behaviour. In the context of uses and gratifications, the concept of activity refers to the choices made by the audience, such as opting to read online news rather than watching television news. On the other hand, activeness represents the underlying motivations and intentions of individuals engaging in particular media activities (Baran & Davis, 2015).

Furthermore, displacement refers to the substitution of one activity with another, and in the context of media, it relates to the extent to which individuals sacrifice certain media activities that fulfil similar needs as television but are perceived to be less effective (Neuman, 1988). Expanding upon these theoretical foundations, the study formulates hypotheses and research questions to delve deeper into the dynamics of audience behaviour.

By investigating the interplay between uses and gratifications, activeness, and displacement, the study aims to shed light on the factors that drive individuals to choose online news consumption over other media options. Additionally, it seeks to understand the extent to which individuals are willing to sacrifice certain media activities, such as television, in favour of online news. Through a comprehensive theoretical framework, the study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge and provide valuable insights into

audience preferences, motivations, and media consumption patterns.

**H.** Online news consumption is likely to displace the print version of newspapers among media students.

### Uses of News

**RQ1:** To what extent do media students happen to read the news?

**RQ2:** How much time do media students consume for reading news on a daily basis?

**RQ3:** What is the difference in daily and weekly preferences for the consumption of news?

### The Ease and Preference for News from Print Newspapers and Online Media

**RQ4:** Which way or the format between print newspapers and online news, do media students perceive easier for reading news?

**RQ5:** Which way or the format between the print newspapers and the online news, do media students prefer for reading news?

### Preference for Print Newspapers and Online News during Emergency

**RQ6:** Which format between the print newspapers and the online news, do media students prefer during emergency situations?

### Credibility Perception of Print Newspapers and Online News

**RQ7:** Which news source between the print version and online newspaper do university students perceive as more authentic?

### Confidence in the formation of Opinions in print newspapers and online news

**RQ8:** In which format between the print newspapers and online news, do media students show more confidence in the formation of opinion?

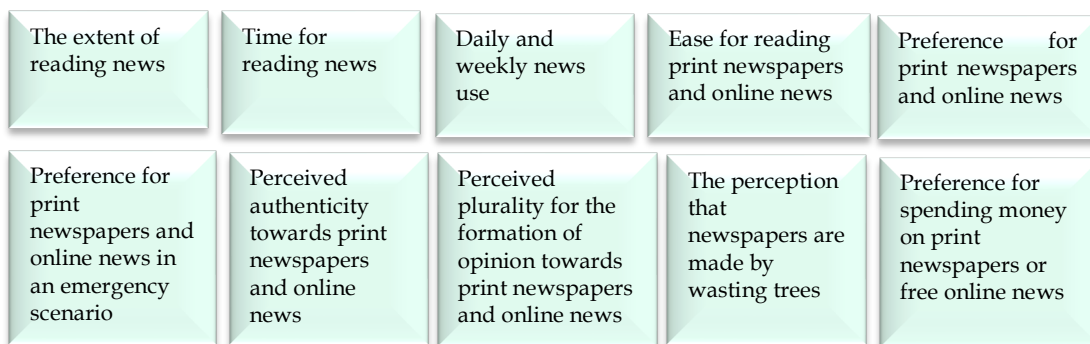
### Reasons for Decline in Newspapers

**RQ9:** To what extent do media students admit that newspapers are printed as a result of wasting trees?

**RQ10:** To what degree do university students show their consent for spending money for the purchase of newspapers?

**Figure 2**

*Specific Variables for Media Students' Preferences and Perceptions about Print Newspapers and Online News*



### Materials and Methods

The population for the study was university students in Lahore city. The purposive sampling technique was used to analyze the

patterns of news reading among university students who belonged to the discipline of media and communication students or which is also known as mass communication or media studies. The data was collected from the



departments of media studies at Superior University and the University of Central Punjab Lahore. The university students filled out the offline questionnaires and 244 responses were received.

The variables for the study were the extent of reading news ("Do you read news?" "Yes" "No" time for reading news ("How much time do you spend reading news daily?" "30 minutes" "1 hour" "2 hours" "More than 2 hours"), daily and weekly news use ("How do you prefer getting news updates?" "Daily basis online" "Read it weekly in the newspaper"), ease for reading the print newspapers and online news ("Which way is easier to read the news?" "Online" "Print newspaper"), preference for print newspapers versus online news ("Which way you prefer for reading the news?" "Online news" "Print newspaper"), preference for print newspapers and online news in emergency scenario ("In emergency scenario, how do you get news updates?" "Move towards online news" "Wait for print newspaper"), perceived authenticity towards print newspapers and online news ("Which news source is more authentic?" "Online

"Print newspaper"), perceived plurality for formation of opinion towards print newspapers and online news ("Which form of news has more options to form opinion?" "Online" "Print newspaper"), perception that newspapers are made by wasting trees ("Do you admit that newspapers are made as a result of wasting trees?" "Yes" "No"), and the preference for spending money for print newspapers or for online news ("How will you prefer getting access to the news?" "Spend the money for the print newspaper" and "Free access online" The variables were measured on a nominal scale.

Descriptive statistics were used for the analysis of research questions by using SPSS version 25 and Microsoft Excel for the visual representation of results.

### Results and Discussion

There was a total of 244 university students, 124 students were from the media department of Superior University and 120 students were from the media department of the University of Central Punjab, 168 belonged to the male gender and 76 belonged to the female gender.

**Table 1**

*Media Students' Preferences and Perceptions of Print Newspapers and Online News*

Variable	Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Extent of News Reading	Yes	166	68%
	No	78	31.6%
	No answer	1	.4%
Time for reading news	30 minutes	166	68%
	1 hour	48	19.7%
	2 hours	5	2%
	More than 2 hours	11	4.5%
	No answer	14	5.7%
Daily and weekly news use	Daily basis online	158	64.8%
	Read it weekly in the newspaper	80	32.8%
	No answer	3	1.2%
Ease for reading print newspapers and online news	Online	151	61.9%
	Print newspaper	88	36.1%
	No answer	5	2.0%
Preference for print newspapers versus online news	Online news	148	60.7%
	Print newspaper	93	38.1%
	No answer	3	1.2%

Variable	Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Preference for print newspapers and online news in an emergency scenario	Move towards online news"	192	78.7%
	Wait for a print newspaper	49	20.1%
	No answer	3	1.2%
Perceived authenticity	Towards online news	127	52%
	Towards print newspaper	113	46.3%
	No answer	4	1.6%
Perceived plurality for the formation of opinion towards print newspapers and online news	Online	161	66%
	Print newspaper	79	32.4%
	No answer	4	1.6%
The perception that newspapers are made by wasting trees	Yes	109	44.7%
	No	131	53.7%
	No answer	4	1.6%
Preference for spending money on print newspapers or for free online news	Spend the money on a print newspaper	75	30.7%
	Free access to online news	163	66.8%
	No answer	6	2.5%

Figure 3

Prefereces and Perceptions of News for Print Newspaper and Online News

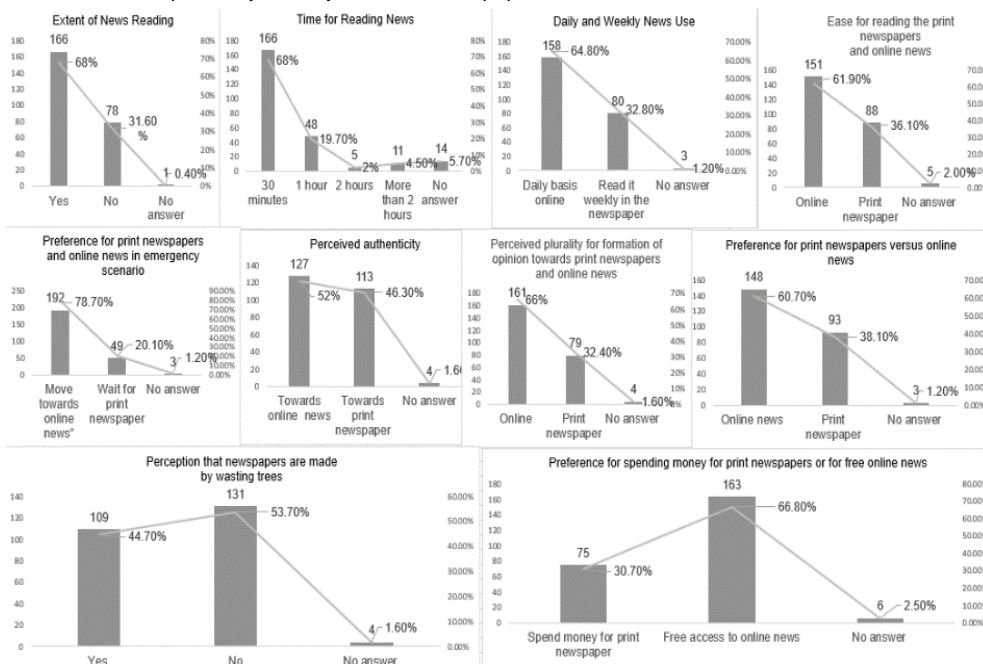


Table and Figure 3 display that 68% of media students happened to read news and 32% did not read news. The majority of the students were reading the news however 32% which is not consuming news shows the lack of interest of university students in the discipline of media and communication studies which need to be worked upon by teachers of journalism by incorporating the educational strategies for news engagement. The time for reading news is also minimal because 68% of media students were using news for only 30 minutes and approximately 20 percent were using it for one hour. Media students were reading online news on a daily basis 65% whereas 33% per cent were reading on a weekly basis from print versions of newspapers.

The study finds support for the hypothesis that media students are preferring online news to print versions of newspapers because 61% of the university students from media departments preferred online news and only 36% preferred the print version of newspapers. The information during an emergency from the news is vital for effective disaster management. Of media students who were finding online news easy 62% but 36% thought that it was easy to access news from the print version of newspapers. Students who preferred the online news during emergency scenarios were 79% but 20% of students were preferring print versions of newspapers during emergency situations.

The perceived credibility or perceived authenticity of the online news and the print version of newspapers reflects the level of trust of media students in news. It was found that 52% of university students perceived online news as authentic and 46% of university students perceived print versions of newspapers as authentic sources for news seeking. The results imply that university students perceive both the online news and print version of newspapers as authentic sources of information.

The university students from the discipline of communication and media

studies were also asked about their opinion concerning the perceived plurality of opinion in online news and the print version of newspapers. This perceived plurality of opinion of vital for the expression of opinions of university students from the media department. It was found that 66% of students were of the opinion that online news had more options for the expression of opinion. Only 32% were of the opinion that print versions of newspapers have more options for opinion formation.

The university students from mass communication departments were asked about their perception that newspapers are made by wasting trees 45% were of the opinion that newspapers are produced by wasting trees but 51% were not in favour of that opinion that newspapers are produced by wasting trees.

Purchasing power is also a vital factor in the consumption of print versions of newspapers. In a country with low social economic status, university students from media studies departments were also asked their opinion about their preferences for free online news and spending money for the print version of newspapers. It was explored that 67% of university students were willing to get free news from online news media but a minimal percentage of 31% agreed to pay for the print version of newspaper.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

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Online news media is found to displace the print version of newspapers among students of media and communication studies in Pakistan which has serious implications for print journalism and media managers. The majority of students preferred online news, found it easier to get online news, preferred online news during emergencies, and perceived that online news has more options for opinion formation. The purchasing power is the vital factor which reduces the use of print versions of newspapers.



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