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Exploring the Conceptual Background of Newspaper Vendors, Street Vending, and Social Security

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ABSTRACT

Newspaper vendors play an essential role in the dissemination of news and information and are responsible for the distribution and sale of newspapers to customers. They can be found on street corners, near public transportation hubs, or in other high-traffic areas, selling newspapers to people on their way to work, school, or other activities. They provided readers with physical copies of newspapers, enabling them to stay informed about current events, local news, and various topics of interest. Additionally, newspaper vendors served as a source of local knowledge and community interaction, often engaging in conversations with customers and building relationships within their communities. As readers increasingly shift to digital platforms for accessing news, the demand for physical newspapers declines. This transition to digital newspapers can impact the livelihoods of newspaper vendors, affecting their financial stability and job security. They may face challenges in accessing social security benefits or adapting to alternative income sources, further exacerbating their economic uncertainties.

Keywords: *Newspaper, vendors, digital platform, financial stability, social security.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1780, India has grown to be one of the world's largest media marketplaces. The Indian press has always expressed dissent against authority, whether it was the East India Company or the British government. However, in the twenty-first century, journalism in India saw alliances with advertising as well as the government, gradually providing businesses prominence and becoming the country's first line of communication.

The Indian media chronology began in 1780, when James Augustus Hickey established the Bengal Gazette, the country's first newspaper. In India, radio transmission began in 1927, and the Press Trust of India was established in 1947. Doordarshan, India's public service broadcaster, was established in 1959; several commercial TV stations entered the market by

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1992; internet publishing began in the early 2000s; and broadcasting services were digitalized in 2011.

As per the Annual Statements received for 2021-22, the number of Dailies being published in the country was 10,038 as against 9,750 during 2020-21. The claimed circulation of Dailies decreased from 22,58,56,735 to 22,57,26,209 copies per publishing day, a decrease of 00.06 percent. Hindi had 4424 Dailies, claiming a circulation of 10,34,83,185 copies, while 1107 Urdu dailies, 1065 Telugu dailies, and 825 English dailies claimed 1,97,81,900, 1,36,36,825 & 2,09,14,036 copies per publishing day respectively.

“Dina Chethi”, a Tamil/Daily published from Chennai was the largest circulated single edition daily with a claimed circulation of 8,62,313 copies per publishing day followed by “Anandbazar Patrika”, a Bengali/Daily published from Kolkata with a claimed circulation of 804408 copies per publishing day.³

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF NEWSPAPER VENDORS

The history of Indian newspaper vendors is closely intertwined with the growth and development of the Indian print industry itself. The role of newspaper vendors has evolved over time, adapting to changes and the shifting media landscape. In the early years, newspaper vendors emerged as key intermediaries between publishers and readers. In ancient India, the concept of newspapers as we know them today did not exist. However, there were forms of news dissemination and public announcements that played a similar role in informing the population. These methods relied on human vendors to distribute the information to the public. While not directly analogous to modern newspaper vendors, these historical figures can be considered as the precursors to the modern news distribution system.

- **Town Criers:** In ancient India, town criers played a crucial role in disseminating news and public announcements. These individuals, often appointed by the local rulers or administrators, would roam the streets and public spaces, loudly proclaiming news, edicts, and important announcements. They would use their voices to capture the attention of the people and convey the information. Town criers were typically trusted individuals who were selected for their clarity of speech and reliability.
- **Royal Messengers:** Another method of news dissemination in ancient India was through the use of royal messengers. Kings and rulers employed messengers who would carry important messages, decrees, and news from one place to another. These messengers

³ Office Of Registrar Of Newspapers For India, available at: http://rni.nic.in/pdf_file/pin2021_22/Chapter%2006.pdf (last visited on June 15, 2023)

were usually trusted individuals who had to travel long distances on foot or horseback to deliver the information. They would be responsible for conveying the news accurately and in a timely manner to the intended recipients.

- **Pilgrims and Travelers:** India has a long history of pilgrimage, with people traveling to holy sites and sacred places across the country. Pilgrims and travelers would often bring news from different regions as they journeyed, acting as informal news carriers. They would share information and stories they had heard along the way, serving as a means of spreading news from one place to another.
- **Marketplaces and Bazaars:** Marketplaces and bazaars were important hubs of economic and social activity in ancient India. These bustling centers attracted people from various walks of life. News and information would naturally flow through these places as merchants, traders, and customers interacted. People would gather to exchange news, discuss current events, and share information about local and regional affairs.
- **Modernization and Digitalization:** With the advent of the internet and digital media, the print industry underwent significant changes. Online news portals and digital subscriptions became popular, leading to a decline in print newspaper sales. However, newspaper vendors adapted to these changes by diversifying their offerings. Many newsstands now sell a range of items, including snacks, beverages, and convenience products, to attract customers beyond newspaper buyers.

It is important to note that ancient India had a diverse range of languages, scripts, and regional kingdoms, making news dissemination a localized affair. The methods of news distribution varied from region to region, and the vendors who performed these roles were often specific to their respective localities. While these historical figures were not newspaper vendors in the modern sense, they served as important channels for the dissemination of news and information in ancient India.

III. CHAIN OF DISTRIBUTION OF NEWSPAPER

Newspaper vendors play a crucial role in the distribution process of newspapers. They are the last link between the newspaper publishers and the readers as they bridge the gap between publishers and readers, ensuring timely delivery, personalized service, and effective communication. Their role goes beyond simple sales, as they contribute to the overall customer experience and play a vital part in the success of newspaper circulation.

(A) Role of Publishers

Publishers are responsible for printing and producing the newspapers. They manage the entire production process, including sourcing news content, designing the layout, editing articles, and arranging advertisements. Publishers ensure that the newspapers are printed in the required quantity, quality, and format to meet the demands of readers and advertisers.

(B) Role of Newspaper dealer/agent

The main function of the newspaper dealer/agent in a newspaper business is to manage and coordinate the distribution of newspapers to readers, subscribers, and retail outlets. The circulation department is responsible for ensuring that newspapers are delivered on time and in good condition to their intended recipients.

- At the Depot – The distribution process begins at 4 am to deliver newspapers at customer's doorstep at 6 am. The newspapers get printed around 1 am. Once the paper is out, the distribution team will number the bundles, fasten challan/receipt and expedite them to different stations. The challan contains the title of the sales representative, number of copies of each newspaper, station title, etc. The newspaper van arrives at the depot between 3 and 4 am. At the depot, the driver and the support staff perform the assignment of emptying the bundles.
- To Home – The newspaper agents sort out the papers and inserts pamphlets if any (As per the law, it is prohibited to insert pamphlets). Each agent will have a group of delivery boys who in turn will deliver the papers to homes.

Here are some of the key functions of the newspaper dealer/agent:

- Subscription management: The newspaper dealer/agent manages and maintains the subscriber database, handles subscription renewals and cancellations, and ensures that subscribers receive their newspapers on time.
- Distribution planning: The newspaper dealer/agent plans the distribution of newspapers to different locations based on the demand and circulation figures. They also coordinate with delivery agents and vendors to ensure that the newspapers are delivered on time.
- Delivery management: The newspaper dealer/agent is responsible for managing the delivery of newspapers to subscribers and retail outlets. This includes assigning delivery routes, managing delivery schedules, and ensuring that the delivery personnel have the necessary resources to deliver the newspapers.

The Newspaper Agent/Dealer must direct and manage home deliveries (orders) and newsstand

selling newspapers. The first is centered around sale or delivery of newspapers to subscribers' homes by broker or mail. Individual sales management copies at newsstands and other outlets is another marketing responsibility of the circulation department.

- Direct Sales - People who move away from publication centers can contact for publication daily newspapers at their destinations by post. Circulation the department may send newspapers to such customers later receiving an advance payment for a certain period as customer wants, including postage. These subscribers are known as postal subscribers and their order is called a postal order. When it comes to publishing newspaper distribution by mail he himself receives the margin which he would otherwise receive go to the agent. This is where the publisher comes into play agent too.
- Personal service - The newspaper becomes a welcome daily visitor every home has a task that requires careful supervision, a great staff and steady work. To achieve this for that, publishers need a network of agents to distribute in different places. Agents receive newspapers directly wholesale from the publisher's circulation department. Of course, he has to pay a certain amount to the publisher at least two months in advance. This account has a balance at the end of the 45th day. It means the amount owed to the publisher is only for the next 15 days. Therefore, the broker has to pay the value of the newspapers again which he obtained for 45 days and so back down payment amount.
- Customer service: The circulation department handles customer inquiries, complaints, and feedback related to the delivery of newspapers. They also ensure that subscribers receive timely and satisfactory resolutions to their issues.
- Revenue management: The circulation department is responsible for managing the revenue generated from the sales of newspapers, subscriptions, and advertising. They analyze circulation figures, sales data, and customer feedback to identify areas for improvement and growth.

(C) Sale of Newspapers

The *NEWSPAPER VENDORS/HAWKER* sells newspapers through the following means:-

- Sales through newsstands – To promote sales of newspapers, agents organize newsstands sales. Sometimes the agents themselves engage in this business on busy avenues. People buy newspapers directly from newsstands based on cash and pickup service. There is no certainty about that newsstand sales because people shop every day, if that's the case to be convenient. Some people who buy from newsstands can avoid

daily purchase at the end of the month due to lack of money. Hence the sales volume the newspaper is not definite or certain every day.

- Home delivery sales - When an agent sells a newspaper a customer, he has to sell it on credit and wait a month's time to collect the due payment. The agent does home delivery two ways - direct delivery through line boys and delivery through subagent
 - Direct delivery to subscribers by delivery boys - Home subscribers are regular customers and direct customers of the agents. They get their own copy through newspaper line boys who work under guidance agents.
 - Delivery through subagents – In numerous circumstances agents nominate subagents to carry on the assignment of distribution of the newspapers. The subagents convey the newspapers at the door steps of the subscribers in different districts. In brief, the subagents play the part of the agent as far as the distribution of newspapers is concerned.

IV. THE RISE OF DIGITAL NEWSPAPERS IN INDIA

Between 1991 and 2006, the rise of television and the introduction of the internet swept the country. Many news stations began to emerge in English and regional languages, covering national and local news 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Everyone now has easier access to news thanks to the internet and social media. It had an impact on the print industry because consumers grew hungry for new media options, compelling practically every news publisher to develop a news website.

Over the last decade, the newspaper business has embraced digital media in the same manner that TV and radio did in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. However, the digital media landscape is rapidly changing as a result of a variety of causes, including the launch of free 4G by telecom companies such as Reliance Jio and the rapid rise of smartphone sales. These have been shown to impact human behaviour when it comes to consuming news not just in urban areas but also in rural areas of the nation, making it more difficult than ever before for the country's conventional newspaper business. According to a joint ShareChat and Nielsen India survey on India's next billion internet users, approximately 73% of internet users check into social networking sites every day, with videos being the most desired material⁴.

As people begin to embrace smartphones and consume news online, especially in rural regions, it is impossible to deny that the print industry in the nation has suffered a blow, despite

⁴ Sharechat, "Understanding India's Next Billion Internet Users", 9 (2020)

forecasting a good growth trajectory. The challenge for the Indian newspaper business in the future will be to design unique engagement techniques and keep their readers through digital platforms while still producing cash from advertising and subscriptions to support the print versions. Here are some ways in which digital media has affected newspaper vendors:

- **Declining Print Readership:** With the rise of digital media platforms, more people are consuming news online through websites, mobile apps, and social media. This has led to a decline in print readership, as people now have easier and faster access to news through their digital devices. As a result, newspaper vendors have experienced a decrease in demand for print newspapers.
- **Loss of Advertising Revenue:** Advertising has traditionally been a major source of revenue for newspapers. However, with the shift to digital media, advertisers have moved their budgets to online platforms that offer targeted advertising and a wider reach. This has resulted in a decline in print advertising revenue for newspapers, affecting the profitability of newspaper vendors.
- **Distribution Challenges:** Digital media has changed the way news is distributed. Online news is instantly available to anyone with an internet connection, eliminating the need for physical distribution. This has posed challenges for newspaper vendors who rely on physical distribution networks and face competition from online news sources.
- **Changes in Consumer Behavior:** Digital media has altered consumer behavior, as people now expect instant access to news and prefer personalized content. Many readers find it more convenient to access news online, customize their news preferences, and receive real-time updates. This shift in consumer behavior has led to a decrease in the demand for physical newspapers, affecting newspaper vendors.
- **Diversification Efforts:** To adapt to the changing landscape, newspaper vendors have had to diversify their offerings. Many vendors have expanded their services to include online news platforms, mobile apps, and digital subscriptions. They have also explored alternative revenue streams such as events, sponsored content, and e-commerce partnerships to supplement declining newspaper sales.

In summary, digital media has significantly impacted newspaper vendors by reducing print readership, diminishing advertising revenue, creating distribution challenges, changing consumer behaviour, and necessitating diversification efforts to adapt to the evolving media landscape.

V. NEWSPAPER VENDORS STRUGGLE AMIDST THE PANDEMIC: COVID'S IMPACT UNVEILED

The future does not look positive for newspaper vendors either, as more and more newspapers, both national and regional, close their print editions and shift to digital media. According to a September 2020 report by the organisation India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra), major print media businesses saw a 67% year on year revenue decrease during the first quarter of the fiscal year 2020-21. According to the study, this was due to a 76% decline in advertisement revenue and a 32% drop in circulation revenue.⁵

Newspaper subscriptions began to plummet even before Covid, some five years ago, with the widespread use of digital media. Even yet, some people continued to read their daily newspaper. However, COVID provided further reasons for readers to abandon newspapers. Here are some ways in which newspaper vendors have been affected:

- **Disruption in Distribution:** During lockdowns and restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus, newspaper production and distribution faced significant challenges. Many printing presses had to temporarily shut down or reduce operations due to labour shortages or logistical issues. This disruption in the supply chain affected newspaper vendors' access to newspapers, leading to a decrease in their availability and subsequently impacting sales.
- **Decline in Circulation:** With people staying at home, offices and educational institutions operating remotely, and reduced outdoor activities, the demand for newspapers declined. Many readers shifted to digital platforms for accessing news and information, leading to a decrease in physical newspaper sales. This decline in circulation directly affected the newspaper vendors' customer base and sales volume.
- **Economic Challenges:** The pandemic resulted in economic hardships for many individuals, including newspaper vendors. With people facing job losses, salary cuts, or financial instability, the purchasing power and willingness to buy newspapers decreased. Vendors experienced a decline in their customer base, affecting their income and livelihoods.
- **Safety Concerns:** Newspaper vendors, like many frontline workers, faced health risks during the pandemic. Interacting with numerous customers daily increased the exposure

⁵ Laasya Shekhar, "Newspaper distributors in Chennai fight COVID blues without any support" *Citizen Matters*, July.6, 2021

to the virus. Some vendors also experienced challenges in implementing safety measures such as maintaining physical distancing or ensuring the use of masks among customers. These concerns added to the overall difficulties faced by the vendors.

VI. CONCLUSION

In an era dominated by digital technology and instant access to information, one might question the continued relevance of print newspapers. The reason why printed newspapers remain important is that Digital media cannot match the distinct and tactile reading experience that printed newspapers provide. The tactile experience of turning pages, underlining content, and indulging in the wistful aroma and feel of a newspaper are all valued by readers. The overall reading experience is improved by the visual appeal of print, which features imaginative layouts and excellent graphics. Additionally, reading newspapers in print encourages concentrated behaviors free from digital distractions, which improves comprehension and memory. They are inclusive because they can be accessed without the need for devices or the internet, especially in places with inadequate digital infrastructure. Furthermore, print newspapers foster ties within the community by providing venues for local journalism. As historical documents, they are valuable for preservation, and given the digital divide, they guarantee that knowledge is shared with a wider audience.
