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# THE EXPRESSION

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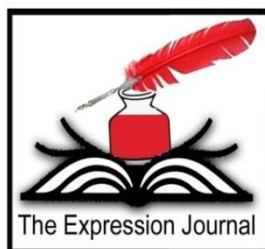


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## USAGE AND IMPACT OF URDU NEWSPAPERS IN KASHMIR: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF URDU AND ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

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### Abstract

Though the sources and platforms of information have changed from very few to countless that too at affordable conditions, the media industry in the valley of Kashmir is more or less confined to the newspaper sector and there are no or very few local television channels and the ones that exist face ban on news as a backdrop of the turmoil that exists in Kashmir. Urdu is the official language of Jammu and Kashmir and due to this wide usage Urdu Press holds a key position in the journalism of Kashmir. Being the pioneer of journalism in the region and a connecting link between people of different sects as well as between people and government, Urdu newspapers have been the back bone of structural set-up in the valley of Kashmir. Press in Kashmir has always been put under pressure either with some suppressing laws or direct scrutiny first by the monarchs and later by different governments that came into force in Kashmir. Operating under the axe of immense pressures is always difficult for any institution but Urdu Press in Kashmir has always been quite remarkable to withstand these pressures and maintained the journalistic standards. From time to time the newspapers have been either directly or indirectly critical of the suppression and wrong doings of the government. Being a conflict region there have always been challenges that came through the way of Press in Kashmir. The current study focusses on the impact and usage of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir at a time when media especially newspapers in Kashmir are much more concentrated. The study reveals that over the last couple of decades, Urdu newspapers in Kashmir have lost the sheen and past glory with a stiff competition from other media especially English newspapers. From readership to circulation and impact, Urdu newspapers are now lagging behind irrespective of being pioneers of journalism in the valley of Kashmir.

### Key-Words

Press, Media, Readership, Circulation, Journalism.

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### Introduction

Though the inception of journalism in Kashmir was much later than other parts of the world but within less than 50 years Press in Kashmir has sprinted its way towards new heights of development. With a galaxy of media organizations around, Press in Kashmir has accepted all the challenges and advanced considerably. But over the years mushroom growth of newspapers in many languages though has increased the competition but only few newspapers have been able to withstand this competition and only a few are known among the readers.

Since their inception dating back to 1924, Urdu newspapers have been part of Kashmir's cultural framework because of Urdu being the official language of the region and a common connecting link between the people of different dialects and tribal groups of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and because these newspapers have been the representatives of the common interests of the people of Kashmir who for ages have been under the occupation of external forces in one way or the other.

According to official figures the number of approved English newspapers is 53 while as the number of approved Urdu newspapers is 112. Non-approved newspapers in English are 16 in number and in Urdu the number is 65. This signifies that 69% of the total newspapers are in Urdu language while as English newspapers count for 27% and the rest 4% are in Kashmiri.

Even though the number of the newspapers is high and still growing, only few newspapers have been able to make a name with readers. According to a survey sponsored by Union Ministry of Home Affairs and conducted by the Institute of Research in India and International Studies (IRIIS) in 2010, 69 newspapers in Kashmir have no or little circulation. The survey report "A Perception Survey of Media Impact on the Kashmiri Youth" reads that these newspapers have a dismal circulation ranging from 50 to 500. As per the report 8 English newspapers and 16 Urdu newspapers have virtually no circulation. Only a few newspapers have a considerable circulation and are quite famous among the readers. *Greater Kashmir*, *Rising Kashmir*, *Kashmir Monitor*, *Kashmir Times*, *Kashmir Life* and *Kashmir Images* are the English newspapers that are mostly read

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while as among the Urdu newspapers *Kashmir Uzma*, *Aftab* and *Srinagar Times* are the most read. According to official figures as cited in the IRIIS study, the circulation figures of *Greater Kashmir*, *Rising Kashmir*, *Kashmir Images*, *Kashmir Monitor* and *Kashmir life* are 50,000, 25,000, 5,000, 5,000 and 6,000 respectively. The figures for *Kashmir Uzma*, *Aftab* and *Srinagar Times* are 40,000, 35,000 and 30,000 respectively. Rest of the newspapers is way behind with a circulation ranging from 1500-4,000. It is however believed by the experts that these figures are much more than the actual circulation figures which are not that high especially for Urdu newspapers.

The collective circulation of Urdu newspapers might be higher than the English newspapers because they are way ahead in number but individually English newspapers are ahead in terms of readership and circulation. *Kashmir Uzma* is the only Urdu newspaper that is up in competition with English newspapers.

## Review of Related Literature

As far as Urdu newspapers are concerned, not much has been written about their importance, impact and decline. The books and writings about Urdu journalism have mostly highlighted the history of Urdu Press and few notions about their emergence and operations.

1. Mohi-ud-din Sofi in his book "Jammu wa Kashmir mein Urdu Sahafat" provides a detailed account of the history and power of Urdu journalism in Kashmir. The author highlights the legacy of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir. According to the author the publication of first ever newspaper 'Ranbir' in 1924 by Mulk Raj Saraf was a historical event in the journalism of the State of Jammu and Kashmir which not only marked the beginning of Urdu Press but also started the era of responsible journalism. Regarding the impact and popularity of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir the author writes, "The Urdu newspapers have been motivational and have had a great impact on minds of people. Strong editorials of newspapers like *Aftab*, *Srinagar Times*, *Aayina*, *Alsafa* etc. had a huge impact on minds of people. These newspapers became a platform for common people to give vent to their feelings and aspirations."
2. Yousuf M. and Ahmad Gulzar in their book titled "Kashmir Mein Urdu" released by Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (1982) write in brief the advent of Urdu journalism in Kashmir and the struggle it had to undergo in the Dogra regime. The authors provide the dark side of the Dogra monarchy and the courage shown by the people of Kashmir to carry out continuous efforts for the publication of newspapers.
3. Milli Gazette, 1-15 July, 2005 in "Reasons for decline of Urdu journalism" puts forward a comprehensive account of the reasons for decline of Urdu journalism in India which had a considerable contribution in the country's independence movement. The write-up summarizes quite effectively the factors responsible for the decline, the importance of Urdu media in shaping and highlighting the aspirations of people, the role it can play to stabilize the relations of India with neighbouring countries and also suggests some ways for revival of Urdu journalism in India. The Milli Gazette gives Urdu journalism an important place in the country's representation.

## Objectives

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The main objective of the study is to analyze the usage and impact of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir in comparison to English newspapers.

## Hypothesis

The hypothesis for the study is that despite being the pioneer of journalism in the Valley, there is considerable decline in the interest of people towards Urdu newspapers. Despite being the official language of the State, Urdu language and in turn Urdu newspapers are facing challenges in the valley because of certain factors.

## Methodology

### Questionnaire:

A structured questionnaire comprising both open and close-ended questions was formulated and distributed among a randomly selected sample of 200 readers. The respondents were divided into two age groups, 15-35 and Above 35 in order to get a differentiated and varied viewpoint about the research problem. Some of the questionnaires were administered directly to the respondents by the researcher and some were distributed through e-mail contacts and Facebook profiles. The researcher got varied responses from the respondents and conclusions were drawn based on those responses.

### Findings:

Based on the research methods employed during the course of the study, the main findings of the study were:

- Majority of the people in Kashmir prefer to read English newspapers than the Urdu newspapers. More than 76% of the readers read English newspapers in Kashmir. This percentage is only 51% for the Urdu newspapers.
- English newspapers readers spend more time in reading their choice of newspapers than the readers of Urdu newspapers. This gives a connotation that English newspapers are better in quality and variety and keep the readers interested for more time than the Urdu newspapers.

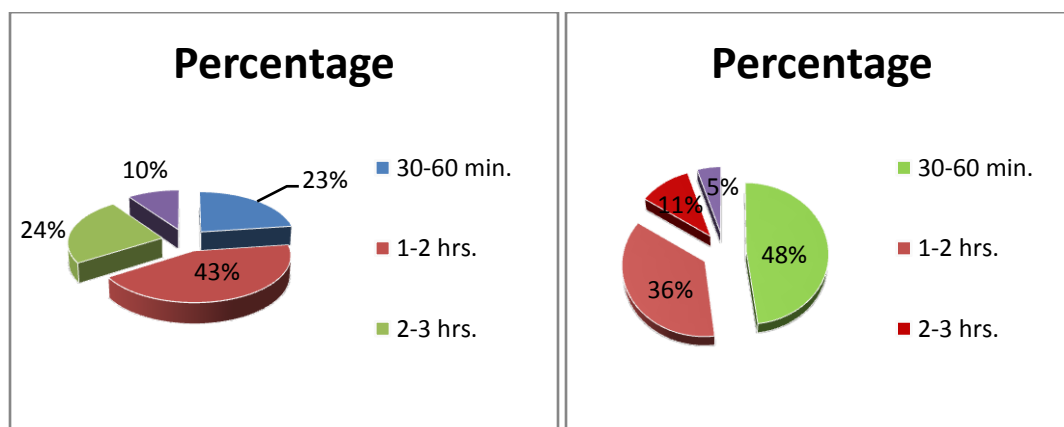


Figure: Duration of reading English Newspapers Figure: Duration of reading Urdu Newspapers

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- 66% of the English newspaper readers and 46% of the Urdu newspaper readers are regular subscribers of the newspapers of their choice. Majority of the Urdu newspaper subscribers are above the age of 35 which gives an indication that younger generation is not interested much in Urdu newspapers.
- Majority of the Urdu newspaper readers (67%) read their choice of newspapers through regular print editions while as majority of the English newspaper readers (52%) use print as well as the web forms to read their choice of newspapers. This is because of the fact that the online editions are much more advanced in English newspapers than in Urdu newspapers.
- Majority of the readers who read newspapers of both languages prefer English newspapers for their better quality and varied stuff. 66% of the respondents prefer to read English newspapers while as the count is just 34% for the Urdu newspapers.

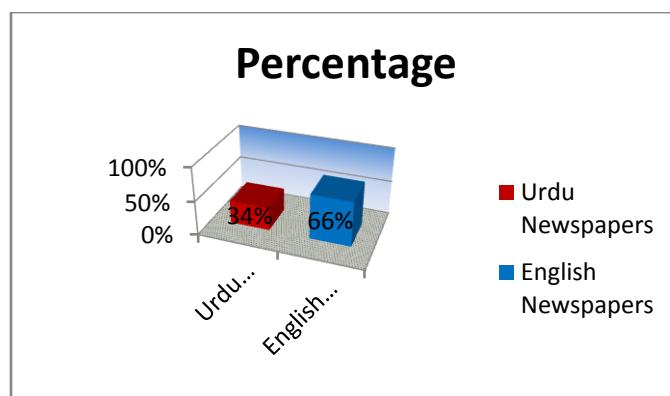


Figure: Percentage of Preference of Readers

- In terms of the satisfaction of readers English newspapers again lead with a total of 64% while as Urdu newspapers are favoured by just 36% of the readers. In the credibility factor and the quality of opinions and editorials the ratio is 62:38 for the English and Urdu newspapers respectively.

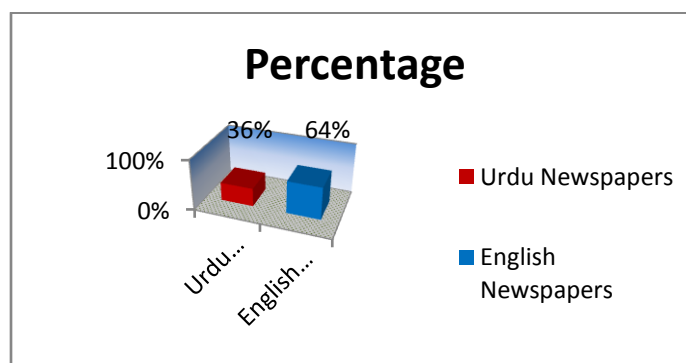


Figure: Satisfaction of Readers in terms of their Preferences



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- 59% of the respondents think that the English newspapers are far better than the Urdu newspapers and the interest towards Urdu among the readers is also fading. 41% of the readers think that Urdu newspapers are still relevant and have an important place in the media circle of the Valley.
- In terms of the view point of readers about the quality of editorials and opinions/columns in newspapers, Urdu newspapers once again obtain lower grades in comparison with the English newspapers. A major 61.5% of the respondents are of the view that the English newspapers have better editorials and columns while as only 38.5% favour Urdu newspapers when it comes to the quality of editorials and opinions.

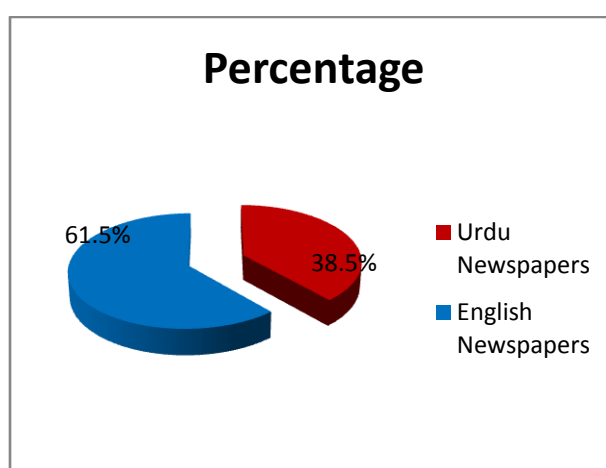


Fig.: Opinion about Quality of Editorials and Columns

- Overall the Urdu newspapers fail to attract the modern day readers who are dynamic in their choice of content, presentation, distribution of different items of news in terms of beats and regions and space for feedback as well the readers' write-ups.

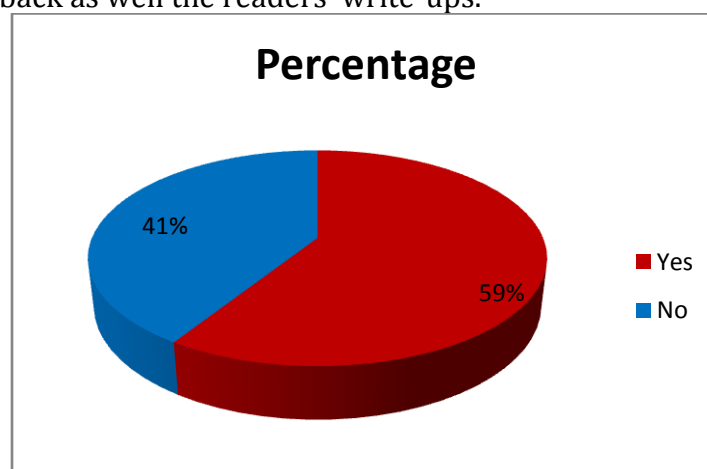


Figure: Whether Urdu newspapers are losing relevance or not

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## Conclusion

Urdu Press in Kashmir since its inception has witnessed many ups and downs but with a courageous operation always withstood the challenges. Once again in the past decade or so, Urdu language journalism is facing severe challenges in the valley of Kashmir and its existence is at stake. Over the years Urdu newspapers have faced several setbacks and English newspapers all of a sudden have started dominating the proceedings. With a setback to the Urdu language at the basic level, Urdu newspapers are struggling to retain the readers.

The Urdu newspaper organizations lack the qualities of a standard media enterprise. After maintaining supremacy over the field of journalism for so long, these newspapers have failed to develop into institutionalized set-ups who can carry the load of increasing reader demands and market competition. These newspapers compared to English newspapers are poor in design, content and style of news, editorials and opinion write-ups that has in turn lead to a decline in their readership and circulation.

1. Work needs to be done for the revival of Urdu language in the state. Promotion of this language at school level, spreading mass awareness through debates and workshops for both people and journalists can be helpful in regaining the lost legacy of the language and eventually turn the tables around again for Urdu newspapers.
2. The senior journalists need to come forward in shaping these organisations into much complex structures. They have to do counselling sessions with new journalists and media students to make them more attracted towards Urdu media.
3. The media institutes like MERC and others need to give special focus to Urdu journalism in order to inculcate interest in the minds of new journalists.
4. Improvement in quality, adoption of changing trends, better content and layout, provision of space to common people, incorporation into digital platforms and hiring quality people can only help in making Urdu newspapers once again the representatives of journalism in Kashmir.

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