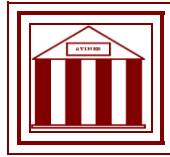


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**How can the Egyptian News  
Organizations get Benefits from the  
Readership Researches?**

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**Lecturer**

**Cairo University**

**Egypt**

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## **How can the Egyptian News Organizations get Benefits from the Readership Researches?**

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### **Abstract**

This study seeks to examine how the Egyptian news organizations deal with the readership studies that conducted by academic research centers & how the findings of these studies could be implemented. An in-depth interview of 12 editors from the editorial and managerial staff in 10 Egyptian news papers, were conducted, revealing some significant predictors of lack of interest from the Egyptian news organizations towards this type of studies, due to several reasons, like biases in the researches' results and the its high cost. Furthermore, the journalists' negative attitude towards their readers.

**Keywords:** Egyptian news organizations – Readership studies – readers' needs

## Introduction

Most scientific studies indicate that the essence of crisis afflicting media systems, especially in third world countries, lies in the absence of in-depth knowledge of the public, in terms of communication needs or their attitudes, and trends about what is offered to them in the media, especially in light of the absence of correlation interactive between communicators in these media and their audiences.

Newspapers have a defensive culture that makes them slow to react to changes in the environment, focused on personal agendas rather than customer needs, and reluctant to work across departmental silos.<sup>1</sup>

It is known that the readership studies play an important role in the following areas:

- Helping managerial and editorial staff to specify their readers' characteristics.
- Explaining all the phenomena related to the reading process.
- Helping the editorial staff to re- plan their editorial policy, according to the results of these studies.

The Egyptian newspapers consist of three main types according to the ownership criterion, the governmental news papers, the private newspapers and the partisan newspapers. Each type of these newspapers has its own economic base and editorial policy.

According to many studies, most of the Egyptian newspapers faced decline in the readership scale, and many readership studies also are conducted to predict reading versus non-reading, subscribing versus non- subscribing or frequency of readership.

A recent study<sup>2</sup> concluded that the factors affecting the readership of the printed press in Egypt included competition from new media, like the online websites, the invasion of social networking sites and blogs. The researcher applies classification of the audience, like *Reader Profile*, *Reader Selection*, *Reader - Non Reader*, and *Editor Reader Comparison*.

In this study, the author tries to identify how the Egyptian news organizations can get benefits from the readership researches, especially after the second uprising (30 June movement). As the Egyptian news papers face a fierce competition from the social networking sites (SNS), concerning them as a main source of information in the latest few years.

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Nesbitt,(2001), **A Conversation about Changing Newspaper Culture**, available at: [www.readership.org/culture\\_management/culture/data/final\\_culture\\_report.pdf](http://www.readership.org/culture_management/culture/data/final_culture_report.pdf) ( At 15 March 2014)

<sup>2</sup>Osman Abdel Haleem, Soheir, (2010), **Factors affecting the Readership of the Printed Journalism in Egypt: Field Study** “PhD Thesis, Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University.

## Literature Review

### *Effect of New Media on Printed Newspapers*

New technologies bring new opportunities as well as threats to existing media<sup>1</sup>.

Early in 1996, Bittner predicted that the rapid growth of Internet newspapers was “the most important challenge facing newspaper publishing.” Nearly half of American newspaper executives felt their papers could be harmed by Internet-based competition.<sup>2</sup>

Not only are the threats of the new media the main challenge for the printed newspapers, but also the new trend of presenting soft news instead of in-depth analysis for the news.<sup>3</sup>

An Internet survey<sup>4</sup> of publishers and online editors found that growth of the Internet newspaper yielded a slightly negative effect on print newspapers’ circulation. The findings suggest that the smaller the newspaper, the larger affect the Internet newspapers had on the print newspapers. Small and medium-sized print newspapers showed obvious decreasing circulation since 1990 while the declining trend was not evident for large newspapers. The readership of the Internet newspaper had been considerably growing since 1995. However, scale of the circulation decline of print newspapers did not show evident replacing effect of the Internet newspapers. About half of the publishers and online editors did not regard the Internet newspaper as a major factor that reduced readership of print newspapers.

A recent study<sup>5</sup> confirmed that the users of the online newspapers compare between the credibility of the printed newspapers and the internet newspapers, and mentioned that they trust the internet newspapers more than the printed editions, due to the variety of sources.

Moreover, more recent studies in Egypt & USA concluded that the growth of the new media didn’t affect the regular use of the traditional media. The use of new media requires more experience and skills.<sup>6</sup> A survey by Nucleus Institute founded that 56% from readers trust the political news published in

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<sup>1</sup>Foo Yeuh Peng, Naphtali Irene Tham, and Xiaoming Hao, “**Trends in Online Newspapers: A Look at the US Web,**” *Newspaper Research Journal*, 20,(2) (Spring 1999), 52-63.

<sup>2</sup>J. Bittner,(1996), **Mass Communication** (6th ed.), (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon).

<sup>3</sup>Saleh, Soliman,(2001), **The future of the printed newspapers in the light of communication technology evolution**, published paper in the Egyptian Journal for communication Research,13, 85-120

<sup>4</sup>Cao, Zhanwei. and Li, Xigen,(2004), "**Effect of Growing Internet Newspapers on Circulation of Print Newspapers in the U.S.**" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans Sheraton, New Orleans, LA, May 27.

<sup>5</sup>Ismeal, Wael,(2005), **The credibility of news websites and its relationship with the future of the printed journalism**, Paper presented to the annual conference in the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University.

<sup>6</sup>Badary, Hend, (2007), **The effect of the Egyptians use of the New Media on his relationship with the printed newspapers**, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University.

the printed newspapers, and 70% said that the traditional printed media are the main source for the political information<sup>1</sup>.

Pew research center<sup>2</sup> confirmed that 29% from the age (under 30) stile have the habit of reading the printed editions of newspapers & they said that the online versions could enhance their readership of the printed newspapers. Another study<sup>3</sup> concluded that the online websites may enhance the power of the printed editions of newspapers.

A study suggests that although the younger generations are moving online, there are social and cultural differences between audience groups that make the transition from print a risky and uncertain strategy for local newspapers. It is generally the same socio demographic groups that read both editions, except for one critical dimension: attachment to the locality where they lived was shared by those preferring the printed over the online newspaper.<sup>4</sup>

In-depth analysis is one of the main criteria that characterize the printed newspapers, in addition to considering it as a comprehensive news source, compared to the online news websites.<sup>5</sup>

The comparison between printed newspapers and online news websites is unfair, as each medium has its own characteristics, for instance, the internet newspapers characterized by interactivity and immediacy<sup>6</sup>.

A secondary analysis of a representative sample from respondents in 27 American cities shows that people's perceptions of local news quality and their preferences for new media features (represented by cell phones and access to broadband) is highly predictive on readership of local print newspapers. Only the new media features are predictive of readership of those newspapers websites, except in one city where a concerted effort has been made to develop the website and drive traffic to it. In that city, website readership is strongly predicted by the news quality variables.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nucleus research, (2007), "**Despite Internet hyper readers look to print for political news**". (Available online at : [www.Computerworld.com](http://www.Computerworld.com) ( At 17 March 2014)

<sup>2</sup>The Pew Research Center,(2006),"**Online papers modestly boost newspaper readers**, (Available online at : [www.peoplepress.org](http://www.peoplepress.org) (At 28 March 2014)

<sup>3</sup>Badry, Refaat M.,(2005), **The effect of the online Journalism on the future of the Printed Journalism in Egypt**, Paper presented to the annual conference in the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University.

<sup>4</sup>Skogerb, Eli & Winsvold, Marte, (2011), **Audiences on the move? Use and assessment of local print and online newspapers**, European Journal of Communication, 26.(3) **214-229**

<sup>5</sup>Millward Brown Research, (2005), "How newspapers stack up against the internet as a news corner", paper presented at the Annual conference of Journalism in New York.

<sup>6</sup>Abdel Maguid, Maha,(2004), **Egyptians' uses for electronic daily newspapers**, MA, Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University.

<sup>7</sup>Thorson, Esther., Meyer, Hans., Denton, Frank. and Smith, Jim, (2008),"**Prediction of Print and Online Newspaper Readership From Indices of News Quality**" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, TBA, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, May 21.

## Factors Affecting the Press Readership

For years, researchers have compiled a list of people's reasons for not reading the printed newspaper. Nonuse reasons include: lack of time; use of other media; accessibility; format; interest in newspaper content; cost; relevance-interest; bias; trust; usefulness, amount of detail; physical nature of the paper; and poor eyesight.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, an Egyptian study<sup>2</sup> has compiled another list of reader's reasons for reading the printed newspaper. These reasons include: the newspaper's editorial policy, how the newspapers cope with the readers' interests, and in-depth analysis for the whole content presented in this newspapers.

One study found young adult readers and nonreaders were least interested in economic and political news, but focus groups conducted by the researcher revealed that lack of interest is not an indicator of political apathy but that the daily newspaper content and readers' daily lives shared nothing in common, unlike local news, which had stronger ties.<sup>3</sup>

A sample of first-time college students (N=343) at a four-year university in Tennessee completed a questionnaire measuring their newspaper reading habits as well as their previous experiences with newspapers. Factors studied included the students current newspaper reading habits, their family newspaper literacy practices during childhood, their experiences with newspapers in their K-12 education, and their civic interests. Family literacy practices in childhood, newspaper experiences in K-12 education, and civic interests all correlated significantly with a habit of newspaper reading in college students, although the relationships were moderate to weak. Consistent with previous research, family newspaper literacy practices correlated more strongly to later newspaper reading habits than the other two factors.<sup>4</sup>

Another analysis shows that individual differences explain most of the variation in newspaper reading, but some of the variance could also be explained as national variance. Age, gender, education level and household income explain differences in newspaper reading, but these variables do not have the same effect in all countries.<sup>5</sup>

A study explores how the time spent on the Internet is associated with printed and online newspaper reading. The direct and moderating effects of

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<sup>1</sup>Zebra, Amy (2010), "What Some Young Adults Dislike About Print Newspapers and Their Ideas for Change?", paper presented at the Newspaper Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication conference, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>2</sup>Osman Abdel Haleem, Soheir, (2010),op.cit

<sup>3</sup>Raeymaeckers, Karin, (2002), **Research Note: Young People and Patterns of Time Consumption in Relation to Print Media**, European Journal of Communication,17: 369-383,

<sup>4</sup>Wilson, Brenda, (2007), "**Factors that Predict Newspaper Reading Habits in College Students**" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, The Renaissance, Washington, DC, Aug 08

<sup>5</sup>Elvestad, Eiri & Blekesaune, Arild, (2008), Newspaper Readers in Europe: A Multilevel Study of Individual and National Differences, European Journal of Communication , 23: 425-447

gender are especially investigated. The survey data ( $N = 612$ ) collected from Finland in 2011 are analyzed by using hierarchical regression modeling. The results of the study show that Internet use has a displacement effect on printed newspaper reading but only among male respondents. In contrast, results show that more women spend time on the Internet the more frequently they also read printed newspapers. This finding is in line with the so-called efficacy hypothesis.<sup>1</sup>

As U.S. newspapers seek to emphasize their combined audience of print and online readers, a new study unpacks this problematic conflation, using a media economics framework to examine the perceptions, satisfaction, and behavior of consumers when presented with related goods of news. Using data gathered from 18,484 respondents spread among 27 metro areas large and small, this study examined key distinctions between online-only newspaper readers and those who read both print and online. We found that hybrid users were more satisfied with their local newspapers Web sites, and used those more purposefully to seek everyday information. For practitioners as well as media researchers, these findings raise new questions about the perceived utility of online news sites, the economics of local newspaper readership, and the active nature of seemingly passive traditional media users.<sup>2</sup>

## Research Questions

Based on the previous studies, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

*RQ1:* What are the main reasons beyond the low circulations in the Egyptian newspapers market?

*RQ2:* Have the Egyptian news organizations hired any academic institution to study the main reasons beyond the low circulations and readership?

*RQ3:* What is the actual use of readership research carried out by colleges and institutes of the media in Egypt and the Arab world?

*RQ4:* To what extent did the Egyptian news organizations concern about readers' interests?

## Method

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<sup>1</sup>Taipale, Sakari, (2013),The relationship between Internet use, online and printed newspaper reading in Finland: Investigating the direct and moderating effects of gender, *European Journal of Communication*, 28.(1) **5-18**

<sup>2</sup>Chyi, Hsiang., Yang, Mengchieh., Lewis, Seth. and Zheng, Nan, (2009),"Local Newspaper Readership in the 21st Century: Exploring Differences Between 'Hybrid' and Online-Only Users" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Marriott, Chicago, IL, May 21*



The author supposed to conduct in-depth interviews with 20 Egyptian journalists, but according to the current status in Egypt, she succeed in conducting 12 in-depth interviews in 10 news organizations in Egypt, representing different newspapers ownership in Egypt. And also representing the editorial & managerial staff.

5 Journalists represent the governmental ownership, 4 represent the private ownership, and only one represents the partisan ownership.

(Al-Ahram – Akhbar Alyoum – October Magazine – Rose Al yousef – Al- Gumhoria) represent the governmental ownership.

(Al- Masry Al-Youm – Al-Youm 7 – Al- Sabah – Al- Fagr) represent the private ownership.

(Al- Araby Al- Nasser) represent the partisan ownership.

## Results

RQ1: What are the main reasons beyond the low circulations in the Egyptian newspapers market?

According to the first RQ, there are several reasons beyond the low circulations phenomenon, include the production problems in the press industry, the economic crisis in Egypt, the high price of newspapers (one of the private newspapers in Egypt try to overcome its economic problem by rising its price to the half 50%)<sup>1</sup>.

Also, the social networking sites (SNS) & all electronic media have negative impact on the newspapers circulations, as many of the Egyptian readers depend on these media as a source of information, instead of buying newspapers.

Moreover, after the 25 January uprising, the Talk Show programs become one of the main competitors to the printed newspapers, as it presents in-depth analysis to the events, using effective techniques to attract Egyptian audiences.

Political influences on the newspapers, their relative economic weakness, and the absence of independent “fourth estate” concept of the profession have made journalism a less attractive profession than many others in Arab world & in Egypt specifically. Thus, the news treatment as well as the commentaries of a newspaper will be regarded by the readers with a large measure of defensive skepticism.

Certainly the most sophisticated groups, and to a large extent other people as well, don't accept the news in the printed newspapers entirely at face value, but assume that it may not be completely objective or reliable. They read between the lines, looking for significant omissions and implied meanings.

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<sup>1</sup>Al- Fagr newspaper

RQ2: Have the Egyptian news organizations hired any academic institution to study the main reasons beyond the low circulations and readership?

According to the second RQ, Al-Ahram newspaper (One of the oldest newspapers in Egypt & the Arab World), make a numbers of deals with Faculty of Mass Communication Cairo University, to conduct extensive readership study, but these deals have not been implemented.

October Magazine (one of the governmental magazines in Egypt), hired a Dutch expert house, to conduct a research about the reasons beyond the low circulations and re-plan the magazine staff. The Dutch expert house inserted some negative points related to the exaggerated loyalty to the ruling regime, which led to low credibility, as well as the news treatment and commentaries.

Dar al- Tahrir publishing house hired the Faculty of Mass Communication Cairo University in 2010; to conduct extensive study about the readership level of its publications<sup>1</sup>. But all the recommended results have not been implemented.

Al-Masry Al-Youm, (One of the most important private newspapers in Egypt), has its own research center & try to conduct different studies to measure phenomena related to the journalism profession.

The partisan newspapers in Egypt have weak economic base, because of both advertising revenue and mass circulation sales are low. Thus, this type of newspapers doesn't hire any academic institution to study any phenomenon related to its newspapers.

RQ3: What is the actual use of readership research carried out by colleges and institutes of the media in Egypt and the Arab world?

According to the third RQ, the sample confirmed that there are no real benefits from the readership researches that conducted by the colleges and institutes, due to several reasons:

1. There is a huge gap between the academic studies and the status quo in the Egyptian news organizations.
2. These types of researches try to characterize the phenomenon from the researcher point of view.
3. These types of researches always present inaccurate results.
4. Journalists don't trust researchers and academic institutes.
5. There is a kind of biases in the researches' results.

RQ4: To what extent did the Egyptian news organizations concern about readers' interests?

According to the forth RQ, the Executive Editor in- chief of Al-Ahram newspaper, said that the efforts in this field are limited, non-scientific and non-organized. Mostly, it is an individual effort from some editors; try to interact

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<sup>1</sup>Dar al- Tahrir has 11 publications (Magazines & newspapers)

with their readers through the official page e-mail or through launching a page on Face book, in order to know their readers' interests.

The Assistant Editor in- chief of October Magazine illustrates the previous point, adding that his magazine did not concern about readers' interests, and the only time it happened was in the early nineties, during celebrating 15 years of launching the magazine.

The Editor in- chief of Rose Al yousef online edition confirmed the above results, but he said that they concern about readers' interests through the online website more than the printed edition.

All the private newspapers in the sample, mentioned that their editorial policy equal their readers' interests, so they don't need any extra researches to know what their readers concern about.

On the other hand, three newspapers in the sample added new sections and specialized pages, due to their readers' demands through their page on Face book. These pages and sections include entertainment, new face for politics and readers' contributions.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

In an attempt to explore the benefits of the readership researches, this study sheds lights on how the Egyptian news organizations deal with this type of studies, and to what extent they concern about their readers' interests. The author conducted in-depth interviews with 12 editors representing different newspapers ownership in Egypt, from the editorial & managerial staff.

Results show that there are several reasons for non-reading newspapers like lack of time, preference for electronic media and social networking sites (SNS), cost, lack of interest in the newspaper, poor eyesight and delivery. All these problems were ranked ahead of newspaper content, in addition to the low prestige of journalism and its credibility. As known, governmental Egyptian newspapers have always been closely tied to politics.

Furthermore, this study revealed that Egyptian news organizations do not care about this type of studies, due to several reasons, like biases in the researches' results and the its high cost.

One of the most important findings in this study is the journalists' negative attitude towards their readers. The Egyptian news organizations don't care about its readers' interests, they depend on their personal experience to predict what their readers need, or depending on their personal pages on Face book, to obtain their readers' feedback about the published articles.

On the other hand, this study revealed that the Egyptian news organizations sometimes response to its readers' needs, but with unscientific methods, through nonofficial pages on the networking sites (SNS) like face book.

This study recommends that newspaper readership studies should not be done with any realistic hope of short-range circulation gains. Rather, they

should be done because the newspaper wants to be more responsive to the readers' needs.

Also, readership studies should not be directed only to the content already in the newspapers, it should care about the expected content due to the readers' interests.<sup>1</sup>

As we face a huge gap between the academic studies and the status quo in the Egyptian news organizations, this study recommends that using readership research findings should be based on the judgment of editors, because the editorial decision making is a complex process, which includes not only the readers' needs, but also the values and goals of journalists and publishers, and the economic constraints of the news organizations.

One method for making decisions on what new content to include is suggested by Philip Meyer in an article in the spring 1978 issue of *Journalism Quarterly*. Meyer argues that editors should try to assess the degree of interest in a wide range of subjects on the part of a random sample of all persons in a given geographical area, and then relate that interest to readership of the newspaper. If areas of high interest are found which are not related to readership of the newspaper, the editor may want to consider adding content on these areas.<sup>2</sup>

Another way of deciding what to add to the newspaper is to take ideas for new features, columns, pages, etc. and ask survey respondents to rate these ideas on scales ranging from low interest to high interest.

If the Egyptian news organizations want to conduct a readership research, it should determine at the first the goal of this study, especially that a huge Egyptian news organization<sup>3</sup> hired an academic institute to conduct a readership research & all the results had not been implemented, even this study cost a lot.

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<sup>1</sup>This recommendation fits with the current result of this study, which focus on three newspapers in the sample added new sections and specialized pages, due to their readers' demands through their page on Face book

<sup>2</sup>Weaver, David,(1978), **Recent trends in Newspapers Readership Research**, Center for New communications Research Report, 5,84-91.

<sup>3</sup>Dar Al- Tahrir publishing house

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