

The Print Story

We all know that print media is seeing tough days, what with technology taking precedence. Almost all kids above the age of 10 have been provided with smart phones, tabs, etc, by their parents, and when someone can get all the info they want at the click of a button, why would one want to take the trouble to go to a shop and pick up a magazine? It is the age of fast food and fast technology, after all. In this fast paced world, a single gadget with multiple uses is more attractive, especially to the younger generation for whom patience is certainly not a virtue. It is the age of one line news, and verbose reading material is perceived as too time consuming. The slow death of the reading habit amongst the younger generation is only making matters worse.

With the surge in information on the digital platform, the popularity of the print medium seems to be on the wane. But, even though we, being an integral part of print media, may deride the digital and electronic media for spoiling people's reading habits, we can't ignore some of its advantages and where it scores over print. To begin with, it has a flexible format—digital is more fluid, with constant 24-hour updates; it is news in real time. Of course, it is environment friendly and trees don't get cut to get you news and other reading material. This is crucial at a time when voices to save the environment are growing stronger. It has easy access, what with everyone equipped with smart phones. And, for those with access to computers in the office all day—it is all about any time news, information and entertainment. It is instantaneous and interactive—there are videos, photo slides, and provision for people to post their feedback or opinion on any issue or article immediately. This can be gratifying to the reader.

A magazine, on the other hand, is static, restricted—readers have to wait for the next issue to get their fix. Besides, production of the same is time consuming. However, it's not without reason that people have remained loyal to certain magazines for years and years.

The intangible benefits that a magazine provides cannot be equated with any amount of earth shattering breaking news. The varied topics covered in a magazine provide relief to the bombarding of current news one experiences 24x7 on television channels and the internet.

A magazine in your hand provides you a sense of comfort. Besides, copies of different magazines stacked on your coffee table are an indication of your reading habits, which a number of us like to flaunt. How many of us have displayed copies of magazines in our drawing rooms? We like it when people ask us if we read a certain magazine. It reflects your personality in more ways than one. It can be considered next only to a display of a proud collection of books on your book shelf and your book reading habits.

A copy of your favorite magazine in your hands allows you to access your most liked part of the magazine with ease. You know where what is. The same may not be true for the digital media which, with its numerous links, may leave you confounded. Some other points where magazines can score over the digital medium can be the following:

- Accessible in airplanes where use of gadgets is restricted.
- Quality reading as opposed to quick read on the net.
- Magazine writing allows for use of elaborate prose and lets you put in more thought into what you have to say—the sheer advantage of time works in the favour of a magazine journalist, lending the articles a literary flair, giving the readers the satisfaction of having read something rich.
- It is ideal for the older generation who may not be tech savvy.
- It is something worth archiving; some issues could have a sentimental value and memories attached to it—like a special issue, a collector’s edition or an issue featuring your favourite personality, which you want to cling on to forever.
- The print medium is more credible, reliable and trustworthy as once published, it is forever, unlike the digital medium where any link or post can be changed or deleted at will. An established, structured publishing organization has more credibility than the digital space, where anyone can contribute. It is still in its nascent stage at least in India and not a very organized sector yet. It, more or less, remains an identity less domain.
- Magazine journalism has a serious reputation when it comes to what they print.
- We have the advantage of time to break away from the breaking news syndrome and offer our readers a better-rounded package focusing on well-researched new stories, bring in to focus new people and places, and even promote music, art and culture.
- Filters—(repeated reading, corrections and copy passing through many hands like the sub editor and editor) and time spent on articles before they are published lend more accuracy. In the digital media, it is all about breaking news first and to get as many hits as possible, which might lead to a compromise on accuracy and truth. The appalling language in most of these sites is vindication to this argument.

Apart from the challenges from the digital platform, Indian magazines also had a tough time coping when the international magazines with strong brand values made way into Indian shores. Imagine, the foreign magazines that we used to be crazy for at one time and found difficult to procure are now available in every news stand.

As the world becomes smaller and smaller, people are more tuned in to international news and want to know all that’s happening around the world—whether it is fashion trends, internet trends, books, movies, everything. And, these magazines cater to that need. The interviews with international celebrities done by the international editions and made available to the Indian readers enhance the reading experience of the Indian readers. Being an Indian organization, this is tough to match. Though, we try to make up by buying international articles from various syndicates.

Besides, we have to keep up with their high production values—be it the quality of the paper, their photography budgets, concept shoots and imaginative layouts. And, if we can’t match them

in production values, we have to compensate with rich content. We need to sit back and analyze whether we are giving our readers more and better reading material than them.

Meanwhile, I hope this decline in print media is simply a passing phase and newspapers and magazines are back to their exalted positions soon. We are not ready to give up yet. Yes, advertisers may be favouring the digital platform for their ad spends, but print hasn't completely lost its relevance. From our side, we try to give our readers a reading experience they will cherish. It is imperative to give something new to the readers, offering a different angle to the story or personality that have not already been explored at length by other magazines/newspapers. In *Society*, we went to Gujarat to interview Narendra Modi when he was the CM of the state and put him on the cover. It was an exclusive interview. It created ripples not only in India, but also abroad. The New York magazine referred to our article in its website. So, for lifestyle and news magazines, content becomes king. Apart from content, an innovatively designed magazine, with creative usage of space and photographs goes a long way in attracting readers, even younger ones.

A magazine can be a vehicle of positive change in society and that is why perhaps even some magazines are going strong even years after they were launched.

Until the time people continue to wait for their morning newspaper, print media has hope. Also, when I see young journalism students showing keen interest in print journalism, it gives me a lot of hope. We may have to take some tough decisions and face some difficult situations, but the idea is to keep reinventing and keeping yourself relevant. A good integration of print and digital, which is quite common now, can also go a long way in keeping print relevant. If we can do that, I think the print media will have a bright future in the years to come. Also, may be, it is also time to inculcate the reading habit amongst the younger lot (books/ newspapers and magazine, not just blogs, trolls and memes)—that could be a good beginning to save print from perishing.

I would like to end this with a quote from Nadine Gordimer, a South African writer, political activist and recipient of the 1991 Nobel Prize in Literature. It may not be directly related to magazine reading, but fights our cause when it comes to standing up to the challenges of technology. She said, 'Books don't need batteries.' Well, I rest my case!

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