

A STUDY ON MARKET DEVELOPMENT AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AT TIMES OF INDIA

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Abstract

The Indian media industry is undergoing a structural transformation driven by rapid digitisation, changing consumer behaviour, and intense competition from digital-first news platforms. Traditional print media organisations are increasingly compelled to redesign their market development and audience engagement strategies to sustain relevance and growth. This research paper examines the market development initiatives and audience engagement practices adopted by *The Times of India* (TOI), one of India's leading English-language newspapers. The study is based on data and insights derived from an internship project conducted at Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. (BCCL), Chandigarh, and uses a descriptive research design supported by primary survey responses and secondary industry data. Findings indicate a strong shift towards digital news consumption among young readers, high levels of trust and credibility associated with TOI, and the effectiveness of integrated marketing communication strategies in enhancing brand visibility. However, gaps were observed in hyperlocal content delivery, feedback responsiveness, and consistent digital engagement. The paper concludes that TOI's hybrid print-digital model, supported by audience-centric engagement strategies, positions it well for sustainable growth, provided it continues to innovate in digital interactivity and personalisation.

Keywords: Market Development, Audience Engagement, Print Media, Digital Journalism, The Times of India, Media Marketing

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The media industry plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, disseminating information, and supporting democratic processes by acting as a bridge between events and society. In India, the media sector has historically been dominated by print newspapers, which have enjoyed high levels of credibility, trust, and widespread readership across urban and semi-urban regions. Print media has long been perceived as a reliable source of verified information, in-depth analysis, and editorial integrity, making newspapers an integral part of daily life for educated and informed citizens.

However, the rapid emergence of digital technologies has significantly transformed the media landscape. Increased internet penetration, affordable smartphones, and widespread access to mobile data have fundamentally altered news consumption patterns in India. Audiences today prefer instant access to information through digital platforms such as news websites, mobile applications, and social media channels. The demand has shifted towards real-time updates, multimedia content, short-form news, videos, infographics, and interactive features rather than passive, one-way information delivery traditionally associated with print newspapers.

This digital shift has created both opportunities and challenges for traditional print media organisations. On one hand, digital platforms enable newspapers to expand their reach beyond geographical boundaries and engage with a broader, tech-savvy audience. On the other hand, they pose intense competition from digital-only news portals, social media influencers, and user-generated content platforms that compete for audience attention. As a result, traditional newspapers are under constant pressure to innovate while maintaining their core journalistic values and credibility.

In this evolving environment, legacy media organisations face the dual challenge of retaining their loyal print readership while simultaneously expanding their reach among digital-native audiences, particularly younger readers. To address this challenge, market development and audience engagement have emerged as critical strategic priorities. Market development focuses on expanding readership by targeting new

demographic groups, geographical regions, and consumption platforms using existing content offerings. In contrast, audience engagement emphasises building long-term relationships with readers through trust, interaction, personalisation, and emotional connection with the brand.

Audience engagement has gained particular importance in the contemporary media environment, as engaged readers are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, subscription continuity, content sharing, and positive word-of-mouth promotion. Engagement is no longer limited to reading news articles but includes active participation through comments, feedback, social media interactions, digital subscriptions, and community-based initiatives. Therefore, newspapers must move beyond content dissemination and adopt a relationship-oriented approach that places the audience at the centre of their strategic decisions.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The Times of India (TOI), owned by Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd., represents an ideal case for studying these dynamics due to its market leadership, extensive reach, and ongoing digital transformation. Despite increasing competition from digital-only news platforms, TOI continues to maintain strong brand equity and readership. Understanding how TOI integrates traditional print strengths with modern digital engagement strategies provides valuable insights for media managers, marketers, and academics.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The key objectives of this research are:

- To analyse the market development strategies adopted by The Times of India.
- To examine audience engagement practices across print, digital, and social media platforms.
- To assess reader preferences and perceptions regarding TOI's content, services, and marketing activities.
- To identify challenges and opportunities in TOI's audience engagement approach.

2. Review of Literature

Market development and audience engagement have been widely discussed in marketing and media literature. Kotler and Keller (2020) define market development as a growth strategy focused on entering new segments with existing products. In the media context, this involves targeting younger readers, digital audiences, and geographically dispersed consumers.

Brodie et al. (2011) conceptualise customer engagement as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. In media organisations, engagement manifests through content sharing, feedback, subscription loyalty, and participatory interactions. Calder et al. (2019) argue that engaged audiences are more valuable than passive readers due to their higher lifetime value and advocacy behaviour.

Indian media studies highlight a growing preference for digital news, especially among youth. According to Statista (2024), digital news consumption in India has increased significantly over the past decade, while print readership has stabilised rather than declined sharply. Deloitte (2023) emphasises that hybrid print-digital strategies are essential for sustaining legacy media brands.

Previous research by Panda and Mishra (2021) found that personalisation, credibility, and interactivity are key drivers of engagement on digital news platforms. Similarly, Verma (2023) notes that integrated marketing communication (IMC) enhances brand consistency and audience recall in competitive media markets.

Despite extensive literature, limited empirical studies focus specifically on how Indian newspapers operationalise market development and engagement strategies at the organisational level. This study attempts to bridge that gap using TOI as a case example.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a **descriptive research design**, aimed at analysing existing practices related to market development and audience engagement at TOI without manipulating variables. This design is suitable for understanding real-world organisational strategies and audience perceptions.

3.2 Nature of the Study

The research is primarily **qualitative**, supported by descriptive quantitative data obtained through a structured questionnaire. Emphasis is placed on understanding reader behaviour, preferences, and perceptions.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms to readers in the Chandigarh region.
- **Secondary Data:** Sourced from industry reports (Deloitte, EY, KPMG), academic journals, TOI publications, and official websites.

3.4 Sample Size and Profile

The survey sample consisted of 50 respondents, predominantly students and young adults below 30 years of age. Although limited in size, the sample reflects an important target segment for TOI's digital growth strategy.

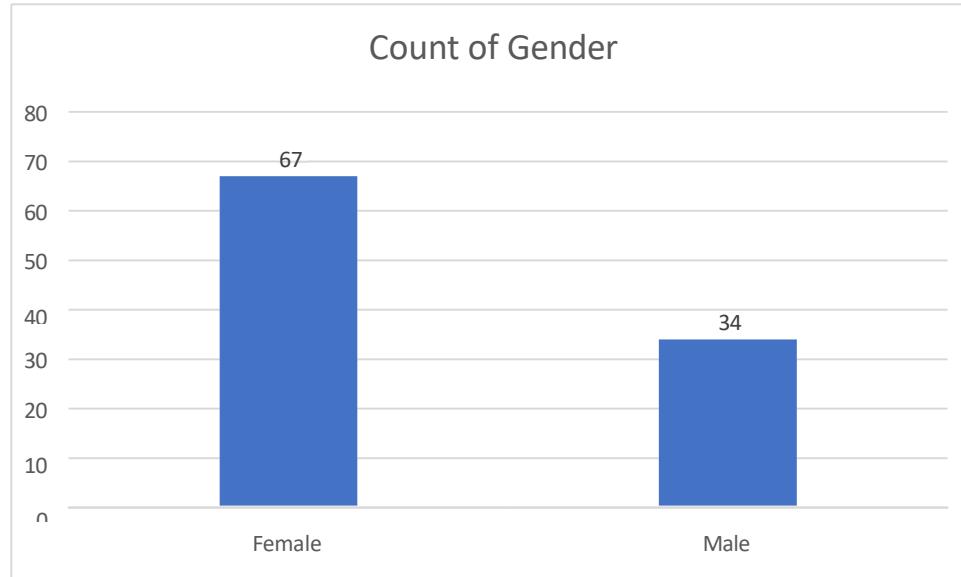
3.5 Limitations of Methodology

The study is limited by a small sample size, restricted geographic scope, and limited access to internal organisational data due to confidentiality constraints.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The data for this study was collected through a structured Google Form questionnaire distributed among a diverse group of respondents, including students, working professionals, and adults. The objective was to understand consumer preferences, attitudes, and behavioral patterns regarding print and digital news platforms.

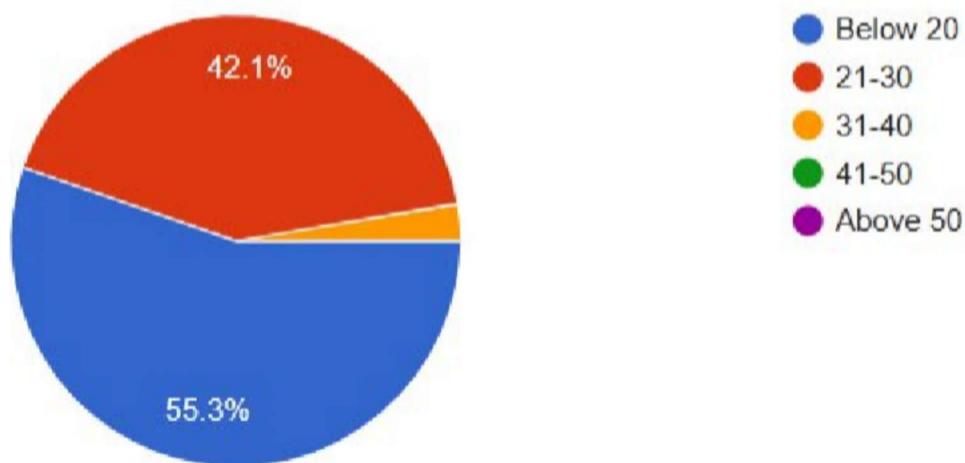
Below is the Analysis and interpretation based on the questionnaire:



Count: - 67 respondents (female), 34 respondents (male)

The gender distribution shows that female respondents (67) participated in much higher numbers than male respondents (34) in the survey. This indicates a female-dominant sample, suggesting that women were more willing to engage.

Age Count



The age distribution of respondents shows that more than half of the participants (55.3%) belong to the 'Below 20' age group, followed by 42.1% from the 21–30 age group. Only a very small percentage of respondents fall within the 31–40 category, while there were no respondents from the 41–50 and above-50 age groups.

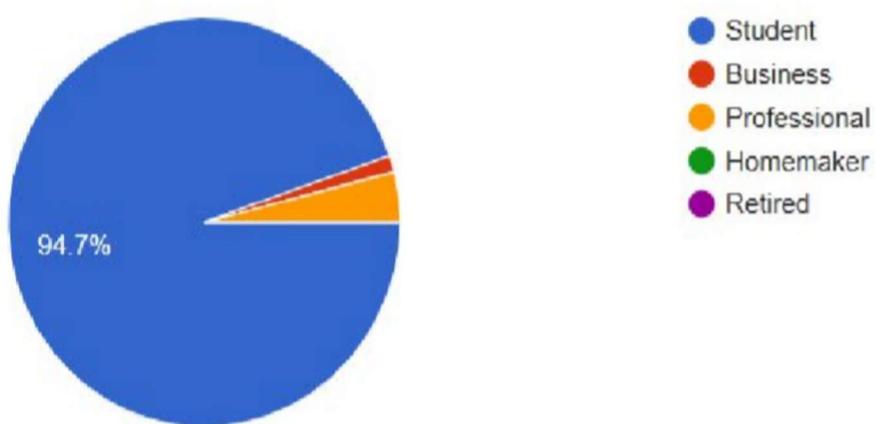
This clearly indicates that the survey sample is strongly youth-dominated, with almost 97% of participants being below 30 years of age. This reflects the high level of digital activity and survey participation among younger readers, who are more engaged with interactive platforms and online content.

For *The Times of India*, this trend suggests that younger audiences form a major segment of potential readers, especially in urban regions like Chandigarh. This age group is more inclined towards:

- digital news consumption,
- short-form content,
- mobile-friendly formats, and
- interactive media engagement.

Thus, TOI's strategies for market development and audience engagement should continue focusing on youth-centric content, social media promotion, campus activation, and digital subscription offers to strengthen its reach within this highly active demographic.

Occupation Count



Occupation Data

- Students: 94.7%
- Business: very small percentage

- Professionals: small percentage
- Homemakers: 0%
- Retired: 0%

The occupation-wise distribution of respondents shows that an overwhelming majority, 94.7%, are students, while only a very small percentage belong to the business or professional categories. There were no respondents from the homemaker or retired groups. This clearly indicates that the sample for the study is heavily dominated by students, reflecting that young learners and college-going individuals were the most active participants in the survey. Their higher participation may be due to better digital literacy, comfort with online forms, and frequent engagement with educational content and online news.

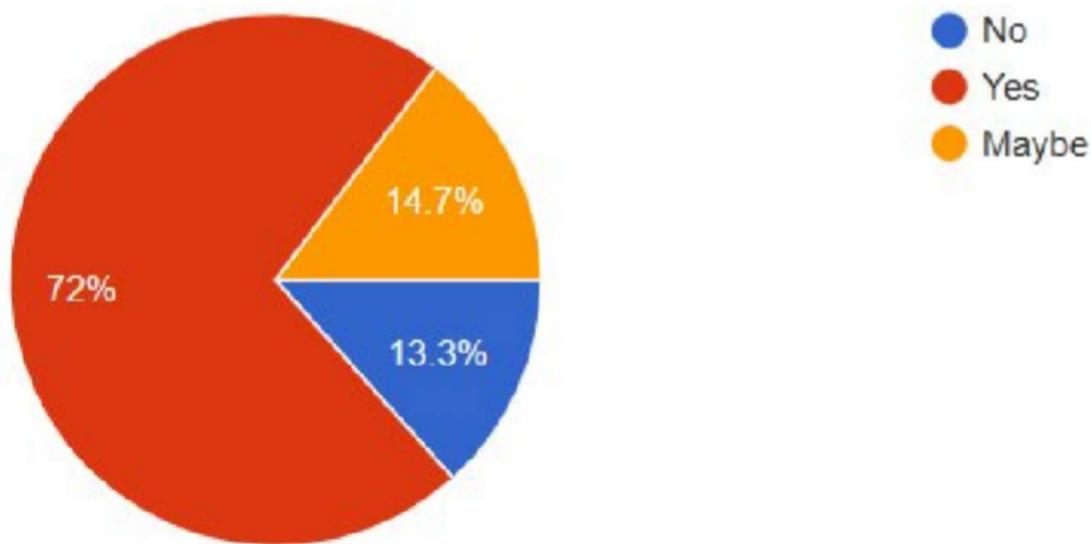
For *The Times of India*, this finding is significant because it highlights that students form a major potential audience segment, especially for:

- digital news consumption,
- interactive content (videos, short stories),
- educational and career-related sections,
- youth-focused campaigns and events.

This also aligns with current media trends where younger age groups are more active online and show higher engagement with mobile apps, e-papers, and social media platforms.

Overall, the occupation data confirms that TOI should continue developing youth-centric engagement strategies to strengthen its presence among student readers.

RENEWAL REMINDERS AND SUBSCRIPTION UPDATES ARE PROVIDED ON TIME COUNT



The majority of respondents, 72%, agree that renewal reminders and subscription updates from *The Times of India* are provided on time. This indicates that most subscribers feel adequately informed about their subscription status, renewal dates, and updates through TOI's CRM communication channels.

However, 13.3% of respondents stated that they do **not** receive timely reminders, while 14.7% were unsure. This shows that although TOI's reminder system is generally effective, there is still a noticeable portion of customers who may experience delays or inconsistencies in receiving updates.

These mixed responses suggest that TOI could further strengthen its CRM processes by:

- automating reminder messages,
- ensuring consistency across SMS, email, and WhatsApp notifications,

- improving the frequency and accuracy of communication.

Overall, the results indicate that TOI's renewal reminder system is **mostly reliable**, but additional improvements can help achieve complete customer satisfaction.

5. Discussion

The findings align with existing literature on digital media consumption trends in India. TOI's success lies in its ability to integrate credibility-driven journalism with modern engagement tools such as mobile apps, social media, and targeted marketing campaigns. Youth-centric strategies, campus outreach, and digital subscriptions play a crucial role in market development.

However, the dominance of "sometimes" responses in feedback handling and campaign visibility suggests scope for improvement in consistency and personalisation. The demand for hyperlocal content reflects changing audience expectations for relevance and community connection.

6. Findings

- Digital platforms are the primary mode of news consumption among young readers.
- TOI enjoys high credibility and trust compared to competitors.
- Integrated marketing campaigns significantly enhance brand visibility.
- Short-form and visual content drives higher engagement.
- Feedback mechanisms exist but require greater consistency and transparency.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes that The Times of India has effectively adapted to the evolving media landscape by adopting a hybrid print-digital model supported by strong market development and audience engagement strategies. Its emphasis on credibility, youth engagement, and integrated marketing communication has enabled it to maintain leadership in a competitive environment. To ensure sustained growth, TOI must further strengthen hyperlocal content, digital personalisation, and interactive engagement mechanisms. The findings offer practical insights for media organisations navigating digital transformation in emerging markets like India.

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