

## Information Needs of Media Practitioners in Karachi, Pakistan

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*ABSTRACT: This study explores the kind of information generally needed by media practitioners (MPs) in Karachi, Pakistan to perform the duties. 185 MPs from three types of media (TV, radio and newspaper) were surveyed. Reports of various organizations are the most used source of information. MPs need selective, rather than exhaustive, information on a daily basis. The findings of this study could help design library services and need-based collection development in media libraries.*

### I. Introduction

Media is an information hungry industry. It stands on the pillars of information. Practitioners working in media organizations need current, authoritative and factual information to construct the news. For fulfillment of these needs, media practitioners (MPs) consult many sources and channels of information, such as libraries, information centers, record centers, and Internet. Internet and online services provide huge amount of information but an in-house media library is unique in that it is close-by and easily accessible. A media library can provide accumulated and precise information through current awareness service (CAS), selective dissemination information (SDI), and reference services.

The role of media librarians is, therefore, crucial. They work as information gate keepers. They visit the newsroom on a daily basis and help to assess the MPs needs. Based on the information needs of media practitioners, they select credible and authentic sources, print or digital. Media librarians have information seeking skills in digital environment. They are experts in intelligent searching and use of databases. They also facilitate in information use. In a word, media librarians play an active role in the construction of news.

Media libraries provide comprehensive services to the editorial department. There is an enormous need to identify the need of MPs because they are information users as well as information producers and information communicators.

## *1. Media in Pakistan*

### **Pakistan Press: an overview**

When Pakistan came into being in August 1947, media was gross under development. There were only a few newspapers, three small radio stations, and almost no publishing houses.

Pakistan inherited a weak press with few laws for controlling and regulating it. Like the other countries of the world, newspapers in Pakistan are owned by chains, prominent among which are Nawa-e-waqt Group, The Jang Group, The Herald Group, The Ummat Group, and The Millat Group. These groups are publishing dailies, weeklies and monthlies.

A present, hundreds of newspapers are being published in Pakistan. These are in Urdu, English and regional languages of Pakistan. Besides dailies, weeklies and monthlies are also contributing in print media. According to APNS (All Pakistan Newspaper Society), a total of 951 dailies are being published. Among them, 46 dailies are from Sindh Province, 68 from Punjab, 20 from Khyber Pakhtoon khawah (formerly known as North-West Frontier Province) and 16 from Baluchistan.

News agencies supply both national and international news features and other commercial items to the newspapers, radio, television, and various offices of federal and provincial governments. The first news agency of Pakistan was Associated Press of Pakistan (APP). It was established in 1947 by an Eastern News Trust. It was a private agency from 1947 to 1961. The government took over its control on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1961 by an ordinance called the “Associated Press of Pakistan Taking Ordinance 1961”. It has correspondents in all major towns of Pakistan.

### **Electronic media: an overview**

Till 2001 Pakistan had only government owned television and radio houses, i.e., Pakistan Television Corporation and Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC).

Private radio and television channels have been established to compete with that from other countries. In 2002, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was established. Its objectives are to facilitate the operation of private radio and TV channels. PEMRA has issued 125 licenses to FM radio channels and 83 licenses to satellite TV channels. These FM and TV channels pertain to business, entertainment, food fashion, music, kids, news, religious, sports, youth entertainment and movie channels. These channels telecast and broadcast programs in Urdu, English and some regional languages of Pakistan. ARY Digital and GEO TV are the most prominent private television channels in Pakistan. Their headquarters are based in Dubai, UAE, but their procurement offices and news studios are in Pakistan.

### **Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation**

At the time of independence, there were only three radio stations in Lahore, Peshawar, and Dhaka respectively in Pakistan. The Radio Pakistan, Lahore broadcasted the news of the Independence of Pakistan on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1947.

Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) has 27 stations throughout the country and runs 21 foreign language radio stations. In 1998, Radio Pakistan started FM transmission from the leading cities of Pakistan, i.e., Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore. Entertainment is the prime objective of this service. Now 125 FM stations are operating in different cities of Pakistan.

### **Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV)**

Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) was established on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1964 in collaboration with Nippon Electronics, a Japanese firm, on an experimental basis. In 1965, a private company called Television Promoters Limited was setup. This company was converted into a public limited company in 1967.

The objectives of PTV are to “inform and educate the people through wholesome entertainment and to inculcate in them a greater awareness of their own history, heritage, current problems and development as well as knowledge of the world at large”. (*Wikipedia*, 2008)

Pakistan Television Corporation Limited has 10 divisions: news, current affairs, programs, sports, international relation, engineering, finance, administration and personnel, PTV academy and educational academy (ETV). Each division is headed by a director.

PTV has a national network of five centers: Karachi, Lahore, ETV center in Islamabad (PTV – 2), Quetta and Peshawar. Programs are telecasted on the network except national and regional programs. There are news and entertainment programs for European viewers and Kashmiri viewers.

### *2. Media Environment in Pakistan*

Pakistani media organizations have come a long way since 1947. Today, the media scene is vibrant with intense competitions among dailies, radio and television channels.

However, media organizations in Pakistan do not have satisfactory information facilities. Few newspaper offices have their own libraries. For those that do have a library, most of them are inactive and do not have sufficient facilities or provide reference service, indexing service, newspaper clipping service, etc. Such libraries are often without catalogues and lack professional staff.

Radio Pakistan, Karachi and Pakistan Television Corporation do have libraries but efficient services are not provided. Generally, libraries are in poor shape with respect to collection and services. Photographs are regarded as great sources of information, especially in print media. But photo libraries do not exist in the majority of newspaper organizations.

Internet provides a wide variety of information sources. However, the Internet facilities are not provided in most newspaper offices. Small newspaper offices are in a more pathetic condition.

They do not have libraries, Internet or any other source of information, such as court cases and crime cases. There is no agency responsible for compilation of such information.

Federal and local government offices do not feed news and reports to media houses. These offices do not publish news bulletin themselves and generally do not facilitate information seeking.

Besides, a large number of MPs do not have proper training in their fields. Most of the practitioners are not professionally qualified. Many of them are masters in different subjects like Urdu, English, international relations, history, etc. They are provided on-job training only when fortunate enough in getting an employment in a media house.

## **II. Literature Review**

Information need, seeking and use always get attention by library science researchers. Many of the studies conducted on the subject are focused on groups other than media practitioners.

Edem (1993) studied how Nigerian journalists in four major towns in Nigeria used library and archival resources and revealed that those journalists' major needs for information are related to political activities (27.1%), government affairs (21.4%), social activities (16.4%), economic activities (14.2%), etc. Most of the information they seek was for fulfilling their official duties (95%), such as writing articles, preparing for news talks or news reporting while only 5% was pertaining to unofficial duties. The majority of the journalists (76%) relied on informal sources such as persons whereas 24% used formal sources such as libraries or archival centers. All the surveyed media houses had a library except news magazine houses. Among 10 news magazines surveyed, only 6 had a library.

Joseph (1993) studied the use of libraries by Indian journalists in the State of Kerala. She looked into how Indian journalists used the library and what they used the obtained information for. Her findings show that the use of library is significant. 27% journalists used the library twice or more times a week while 21% used more than once a day. Mostly, they used the library for getting background material and for specific information. They used the information obtained mostly for writing feature or news items. Occasionally, they used it for column or editorial items. News magazine and reference books are most preferred by journalists. However, they also used current and back issues of newspapers. Senior editorial staff ranked first in using back issues of newspapers. They needed information within a timeframe of 5 to 15 minutes. 63% sought information themselves. They did wish to have information on their desk due to time pressure and busy schedules. However, such service was not available to them.

Research has been conducted on assessment and analysis of information needs of journalists. Various authors have formulated criteria for analysis and assessment of information needs.

Nicholas and Martin (1997) outlined a framework for assessment and analysis of information need. They conducted 50 semi-structured qualitative interviews with journalists working in three British national newspapers. The comprehensive framework they suggested characterizes information needs and the hindrances encountered in meeting the information needs. Their study

reveals that the information needs of journalist are diversified, for example, checking the facts on various subjects, researching on background information, and keeping themselves aware about happenings around the world. They highly prefer quality information, authentic and accurate. They obtain information from current (wire) and lesser public means of communication. The main obstacle in meeting their information needs is shortage of time.

Chinn's (2001) study explored the information seeking behavior and information needs of journalists. Three journalists were observed in a case study during the regular workday lasting 8-13 hours. One of them was a sports director at a local television station in Washington, D.C. The second participant was a general reporter of education for a medium-sized daily newspaper located in the Southeast region of the United States. The third participant was a crime reporter at the same daily newspaper where the second one worked. The information needs and behavior were analyzed using the framework developed by Nicholas and Martin (1997). Her findings show that the education reporter had lower information needs as compared to that of the crime reporter. All the three participants needed mostly information for fact checking and current awareness. They used fastest means of communication, such as Internet, e-mail and cell phone to obtain information. Their needs are directly relevant to their subject area and nature of work. The sports reporter requires deep background knowledge and statistical information while education reporter needs descriptive knowledge. All of them are constantly searching information, as they need huge amount of subject and up to date information. The education and crime reporters use online databases, national news, magazines and books for background information and research studies on different subjects. All journalists need packaged information.

Poteet (2000) researched on the use of online sources and influence of attitude on use pattern among American newspaper journalists. These journalists belong to two American metropolitan newspapers. According to the findings, all surveyed participants used Internet. The majority (60%) felt comfortable with Internet. 65.5% regarded Internet as very important. Amazingly, 10.9% of the journalists were very satisfied with their skills of using online information sources and 64.9% were somewhat satisfied. They learned about online information sources from colleagues. They used online information sources to find background information (91.4 %), find facts (91.3 %), read other news media (84.9%), identify sources (50.9 %) and get story ideas (34.3 %).

Attfield and Dowell (2003) investigated the information seeking and use by journalist of a national British newspaper. The data for the study was collected through unstructured interviews with twenty-five journalists at "The Times" in London. According to the findings of the study, information seeking is started with the assignment of work. Journalists seek information for their assignment, such as to establish a perspective of a story, to find truth or facts, and to assess the originality of an angle. Their purpose is to provide their readers with an informed interpretation of events. The authors summarized findings in the form of a model, which depicts the journalists' research and writing process like initiation, preparation and production.

Anwar, Al-Ansari and Abdullah (2004) investigated the information seeking behavior of journalists working in newspaper and news agencies in Kuwait. Their findings reveal that journalists need all types of information, such as facts, general information, and background information. They use a variety of formal and informal information sources. The in-house

electronic library is used for performing various professional activities, such as to get a story angle, to check the background, to analyze previously published materials to avoid duplication and compare coverage. Internet and press releases are the most preferred formal sources of information. Journalists need information principally for writing a news item or a feature article. The major reason cited for use of library/information center is to search a database and read materials there. Main problems encountered by Kuwaiti journalists in the information search process are lack of time and lack of training.

Anwar and Asghar (2009) replicated a previous study done in Kuwait (Anwar, Al-Ansari and Abdullah, 2004). The more recent study focused on Pakistani journalists and found that journalists in Pakistan need information most for checking facts, for getting ideas for future articles and for background information. They used both formal and informal of information sources. However, they regarded colleagues as most important source of information. Their personal collection and daily news diaries are most important among formal sources.

### **III. Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to develop an understanding of the information needs of practitioners working in mass media organizations, such as radio, television, and newspaper. More specific objectives are as follows:

- To determine the types of information generally needed by media practitioners to perform their duties;
- To investigate the formats of information that media practitioners need;
- To ascertain the coverage of information;
- To explore media practitioners' priority of information needed;
- To determine the use of information sources by media practitioners.

### **IV. Research Methodology**

A questionnaire was developed as an instrument for data collection. The questions were derived from the framework suggested by Nicholas and Martin (1997) for evaluating information needs. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions and covered the following areas: types of information needed, form of information, time period required for information, priority of information needed, preference for print and non-print sources, and sources of information.

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the structure of questions and choices provided were appropriate for participants. Some minor changes were made accordingly.

### **V. Profiles of Survey Participants**

A total of 185 media practitioners were randomly selected, of which 120 (64.0%) from newspapers/news agencies, 43 (23.2%) from television, and 22 (11.9) from radio (See Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Survey Participants

Category	Frequency	Percent
Newspaper/News Agency	120	64.9
Television	43	23.2
Radio	22	11.9
<b>Total:</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>

Of the 185 participants, 47 (25.4%) were female and 138 (74.6%) were male.

The participants belonged to different age groups.

Very few participants had a professional degree in mass communications. The majority of them held a Master's degree in different subjects such as Urdu, English, international relations, history, etc. They had received on-job training and were successful in their profession.

The participants included producers, assistant producers, editors, deputy editors, subeditors, and reporters.

## VI. Findings of the Study

### 1. Types of Information Needed

Table 2: Types of Information Needed

Type of Information	Frequency	Percent
Facts	168	90.81
View point	123	66.49
Technical detail	93	50.27
Statistical data	120	64.86
News	117	63.24

Media practitioners need various types of information, for example, factual information or opinionated information. Some information is presented in the form of figures, i.e., statistical data or some contains technical details, such as scientific or technological ideas and skills. Table 2 shows that facts are the type of information most sought (90.81%) by the sampled 185 practitioners. The technical data is the type of information least sought (50.27%).

### 2. Presentation of Information

Table 3 Presentation of Information

Format	Frequency	Percent
Original document	124	67.03
Report	145	78.38
Table	69	37.30
Graph	55	29.73

Table 3 shows that media practitioners need the information in the presentation of reports most (78.38%). The second preferred presentation is original documents (67.03%). Graphics are needed the least (29.73%).

### 3. Coverage of Information

Table 4: Coverage of Information

Type	Frequency	Percent
Exhaustive	97	52.43
Selective	133	71.89
Current or recent	82	44.32
Time-specific	58	31.35

Table 4 shows that the selective coverage of information is needed by media practitioners most (71.89%). The comprehensive coverage of information comes second (52.43%). Information limited by specific time period is needed at a relatively lower percentage (31.35%).

### 4. Frequency of Information Need

Table 5: Frequency of Information Need

Interval	Frequency	Percent
Daily	140	75.68
Weekly	59	31.89
Monthly	24	12.97
As often as needed	53	28.65

Table 5 shows that 75.68% of media practitioners need information on a daily basis. On the other extreme, 12.97% of the participants indicated that they need information monthly.

### 5. Media Format of Information

Table 6: Format of Media

Format	Frequency	Percent
Print	166	89.73
Audio	47	25.41
Video	78	42.16

Table 6 shows that information in print is needed most (87.93%) while information in the audio or video format is needed less (25.41% and 42.16% respectively).



## 6. Priority of Information Seeking

Table 7: Priority of Information Seeking

Priority	Frequency	Percent
Very high	120	64.86
High	100	54.05
Low	11	5.95

Table 7 shows that 62.86% of media practitioners regarded information seeking as very high priority in order to accomplish the tasks assigned, 54.05% regarded it as high priority, and only 5.95% regarded it as low priority.

## 8. Information Sources Used

Table 8: Use of Information Sources

Sources	Frequency	Percent
Research report	96	51.89
Encyclopedia	89	48.11
Journal	87	47.03
Annual report	86	46.49
Dictionary	83	44.86
Online database	73	39.46
Conference proceeding	61	32.97
Yearbook	54	29.19
Directories	54	29.19
Review	43	23.24
Handbook	28	15.14
Bibliographic literature	23	12.43
Almanac	22	11.89
Thesis	21	11.35
Dissertation	14	7.57
Manual	13	7.03

Table 8 shows that media practitioners in Karachi use a myriad of information sources. Top on the list is research reports (51.89%), followed by encyclopedias (48.11%), journals (47.03%), annual reports (46.49), dictionaries (44.86%), online databases (39.46%) and so on. The least used sources are dissertations and manuals (7.57% and 7.03% respectively).

## VII. Conclusion

Media is an information-oriented industry. Media professionals are a group of people who both produce and consume information. Or put it in another way, they produce information for the society based on the information they have acquired through various sources. For this reason, they need a large amount of information almost everyday. They will not perform their duties well without information or information sources.

In general, media practitioners need all kinds of information in every form or format. However, factual information is what they seek most and research reports are what they use most.

Information in the print form is used most. Media practitioners use a variety of information sources, but research reports, encyclopedia, journals, annual reports are used more frequently.

Time is crucial in the media industry. Media practitioners are time-bound. Due to time constraint, they usually seek selective information. However, exhaustive and recent information are also needed.

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