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# Paradigm Shift In Print Media: An Assessment Of Urdu Newspapers In Kashmir

**Syed Aadil Hussain** Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, IUST Awantipora.

**Dr. Ruheela Hassan** Assistant Professor Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, IUST Awantipora.

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## ABSTRACT

The new multimedia technological advancements have had an impact on news media all across the world. The transition to the new digital era presented a number of difficulties for traditional news dissemination methods, particularly in terms of expenditure, quality, diversity, language adeptness, and accessibility. The news media have evolved to be more interactive, quick, convergent, and affordable.

Due to a variety of factors, the newspaper industry in Kashmir contributes significantly to the media sector as there are no or few local television channels. With the increasing usage of online and social media, video news stories are made available by a plethora of individual users and groups, but the questions of reliability and credibility are there, which otherwise is not the case with newspapers. As Urdu has been the sole official language for many decades and still is one, it is the most commonly spoken language in Kashmir, and due to this reason, Urdu newspapers are the pioneers of journalism in Kashmir and continue to outnumber newspapers published in English and the native Kashmiri language. The Urdu press in Kashmir has faced several difficulties as a result of new technical developments, which have put a strain on this media. The current article focuses on the operations of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir in the context of these developments and examines whether or not these newspapers have been successful in overcoming the difficulties posed by digitization. The study is concerned with the difficulties, contemporary issues, and changes in Urdu Journalism in Kashmir. It focuses on several aspects that threaten Urdu journalism's existence, the struggles Urdu Press is facing, and what may be done to rekindle the splendor of Urdu newspapers (if any issues are there).

**Key Words:** Multimedia, Digitization, Urdu Newspapers, media in Kashmir.

## INTRODUCTION

Even though journalism in Kashmir began considerably later than in other areas of the world, it has come a long way in a comparatively lesser time, propelling it to new levels of development. With a plethora of media outlets around, Press in Kashmir has risen to every challenge and made significant progress. Although the number of newspapers has mushroomed over the years and in numerous languages, only a select few have been able to survive this rivalry and become well-known among readers.

The fact that Urdu has been the official language of the area and a common language among the various tribal communities in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as the fact that these publications have served as the representatives of the common interests of Kashmiris who have for a long time been in some way under the occupation of outside forces, have all contributed to the cultural fabric of Kashmir since their founding in 1924.

As per the official statistics, there are 373 newspapers in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, of which 193 are published in Urdu and 131 in English, with the remaining publications being published in various languages like Kashmiri, Hindi, Dogri, Punjabi, etc. 172 newspapers are published in Kashmir province, making up 46% of all publications. 119 of the 172 newspapers are published in Urdu; 47 are in English; five are published in Kashmir; and one is published in Hindi (Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2021). This indicates that 69% of all newspapers are published in Urdu, 27% are in English, and the other 4% are published in Kashmiri.

Despite a large number of newspapers, only a few have been able to establish a reputation with readers. The majority of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir are Small Newspapers (with a readership of up to 25000 copies per publishing day), while only a few are Medium Newspapers (with a circulation between 25001 to 75000 copies per publishing day), according to data from the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI). With a circulation of 86237 copies every publishing day, the Urdu daily Tameel Irshad is the sole publication in Kashmir that qualifies as a Big Newspaper. (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2020).

Even worse, some of the newspapers only sell a few hundred copies each. Even the top Urdu newspapers, including Aftab, Srinagar Times, Kashmir Uzma, Chattan, and Roshni, circulate at less than 50,000 copies per issue. The RNI figures, however, cannot be trusted, according to some sources, as these are those that the owners, printers, and publishers of the newspapers have provided in exchange for financial gain. Even publications with extremely low circulation display higher numbers to attract consistent government advertising and more newsprint (Jeffrey, 1997), as both these are linked with the circulation figures. Some claim that a large number of these publications are run by lone proprietors and sell less than 500 copies while using the antiquated Lithographic printing technique and obtaining fictitious certificates of exaggerated circulation from Chartered Accountants (Gulati, 2015). There are 27 Urdu dailies and weeklies that are still printed through traditional Litho Press

whereas none of the English publications is printed through this method (Department of Information & Public Relations, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2021). This signifies that the adoption of new technologies by Urdu newspapers is lesser as compared to the English Press.

Additionally, Urdu newspapers are under enormous pressure to perform due to the emergence of websites, social networking platforms, blogs, news portals, audio-visual multimedia technologies, and digital Direct to Home services for radio and television (Hussain & Hassan, 2021). For these publications, the challenge is to endure the competition and pressure, provide greater quality and services, and protect their very existence, which is otherwise in jeopardy. But regrettably, research indicates that Urdu publications have not kept up with technological advancements, improved content and printing quality, or maintained professional standards (Qureshi, 2016).

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Very little information on the Kashmiri Urdu newspapers has been documented. Much hasn't been published on their importance, influence, adoption/impact of new media technologies, or their development or decline. The majority of the literature on this subject discusses its development and operations of the Urdu press.

Urdu journalism in the Indian sub-continent started from Calcutta (Now Kolkata) with the introduction of Urdu Weekly "Jam-e-Jahan Numa" by Harihar Dutta on March 27, 1822. He states that Urdu Journalism in India actually started before Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Tamil Journalism with "Udant Martand" (1826), "Bombay Samachar" (1882), "Bombay Darpan" (1832), and "Tamil Magazine" (1831) being the first newspapers in these languages respectively. So, after Bengali newspapers "Sambad Kaumudi" (1821) and "Samachar Chandrika" (1822), Jam-e-Jahan Numa was the second Indian language newspaper that was published from pre-independence India. This makes Urdu journalism second in the vernacular language journalism of India (Iqbal, 2013).

Urdu newspapers in India have failed to adopt the new technologies. The Urdu media have failed to withstand the new circumstances. The temperament and attitude of present-day Urdu journalists haven't changed since the 1970s. Urdu journalism is totally unresponsive to the changed circumstances and new technologies in the mass media sphere. The over-simplified explanations given by the Urdu journalists about the miserable condition are the reluctance of average Muslims to buy newspapers and the inability of Urdu newspapers to secure advertisements as readily as English, Hindi and some other regional newspapers do (Farouqui, 1995). There are varied reasons for the decline of Urdu journalism in India which had a considerable contribution to the country's independence movement. The main factors for the decline of Urdu journalism are that the new generation is ignorant of Urdu and the

state governments are not taking suitable steps for providing and promoting Urdu education at the primary level (The Milli Gazette Online, 2005).

Urdu newspapers in Kashmir have a supreme legacy behind their existence in Kashmir. The publication of the 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. The Urdu newspapers have been motivational and have had a great impact on the minds of people. Strong editorials of newspapers like Aftab, Srinagar Times, Aayina, Alsafa etc. had a huge bearing on the thoughts of people. These newspapers became a platform for common people to give vent to their feelings and aspirations (Mohiuddin, 2006). Urdu is a lingua franca in the multilingual Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and is thus the official language of the region. It is Urdu journalism that actually flagged off journalism in Kashmir and later proved to be a fore-runner of the much sensible English Press. But after being unmatched and doing great service in the field of journalism for around 80 years, Urdu newspapers unfortunately couldn't cope up to the technological advancements and are lagging behind the English Press (Showkat, 2020).

In comparison to the English newspapers, Urdu newspapers have failed to utilise the Social media tools. As per a study of some prominent English and Urdu dailies of Kashmir to evaluate occurrence of Social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, Digg and LinkedIn), 90% of the English dailies have adopted Social media on their websites while as only 2.27% of the Urdu newspapers utilise Social media tools on their websites. The vernacular Press especially the Urdu newspapers need to embrace the ever growing new media technologies like the interactive social media tools to survive this competition (Gul & Islam, 2013).

## **OBJECTIVES/ METHODOLOGY**

The main objectives of this study are to comprehend the importance of Urdu newspapers in Kashmir and to identify the major difficulties that this form of media in Kashmir faces. The report will provide evidence of the use and effects of the latest technological developments. Additionally, on the basis of the analysis, pertinent suggestions have been made to revitalize this significant news distribution channel in Kashmir.

To achieve the study's goals, a combination of techniques was used. Interviews and surveys were part of it. Prominent journalists, academics, and other professionals involved in Kashmir's Urdu journalism served as the interviewees. The purpose of the interviews was to get a closer view of the situation that Urdu newspapers are in and to get some ideas regarding the revival of the Urdu Press if there persists a problem at all. The interviews were conducted through informal conversations with the experts to get more detailed views. Instead of using a questionnaire certain variables were selected and the conversations revolved around those variables only. The variables which were touched by the researcher

included Readership and Circulation, Quality of content, Institutionalization of the Urdu newspapers, State of the Urdu language (Public and Political treatment), Impact of New Media Technologies on the Urdu newspapers, Competition with English media, and role of Academic Institutions

After discussing all these variables, the experts were asked about the ways out to revive the Urdu newspapers if at all any problems persist. In addition to the method mentioned above, a survey of young people was carried out, for which a structured questionnaire made up of both open-ended and closed-ended questions was developed and given to 200 readers who were chosen at random for the sample. In order to obtain a distinct and diversified perspective on the research subject, the respondents were divided into two age groups: 15–35 years and over 35 years. 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 respondents provided the researcher with a variety of responses, and conclusions were reached in light of those responses.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

Since one of the perspectives of the current study is to analyze the challenges faced by Urdu newspapers in Kashmir and New media Technologies undoubtedly are the most predominant among the challenging factors, the theory of Technological Determinism and Media Convergence Theory are the most relevant for the study.

- i. **Mediamorphosis:** Roger Fidler coined the phrase "Mediamorphosis" in 1990 to characterise the development of communication media. Mediamorphosis, according to Fidler, is "the transformation of communication media, usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive & political pressures, and social and technological innovations" (Fidler, 1997). It offers a coherent viewpoint on the technological development of communication media. By studying the communication system as a whole, Fidler found that new media do not spontaneously originate; rather, they grow gradually as a result of the "metamorphosis" of pre-existing media. In today's world, all forms of communication are incompatible with one another since they are tightly entwined with the framework of human communication. The traditional media typically survive the development of new media. Instead, they continuously change and adapt to live alongside new media (Fidler, 1997).
- ii. **Technological Determinism:** It is the belief that technology is the principal initiator of the society's transformation. The emergence of this theory is usually attributed to the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen, who formulated the causal link between the technology and the society (Hauer, 2017). As per the concept of technological determinism, new media also play an important role in

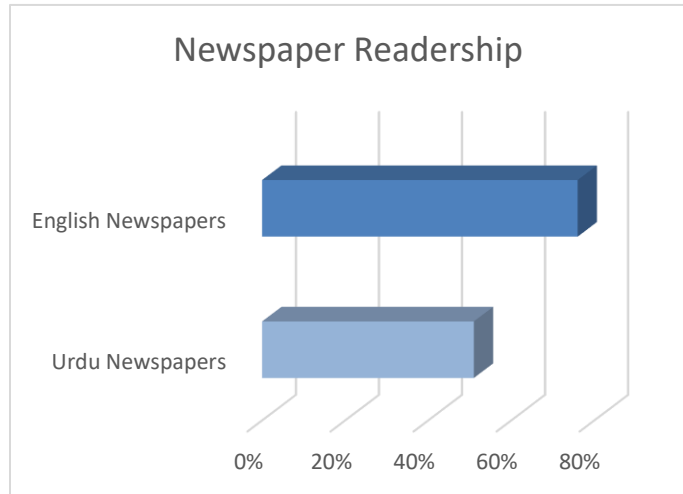
shaping the individual as well as societal frameworks. Thus, it becomes quite necessary to keep abreast with the technological developments at individual as well as organizational levels. Some of the main proponents of this theory were Clarence Ayres, Karl Marx, Langdon winner, William Ogburn, Robert Heilbroner etc. who were of the opinion that technology either directly or indirectly influences the way a society shapes up.

There are varying opinions on the extent of impact of new technologies and depending on that Determinism has been divided into Hard and Soft Determinism. Hard determinism argues that technology is the main or only significant driving force in shaping a society while as the soft determinism argues that society is not that passive and technology is one among other forces that are significant in a society (Adler, 2006).

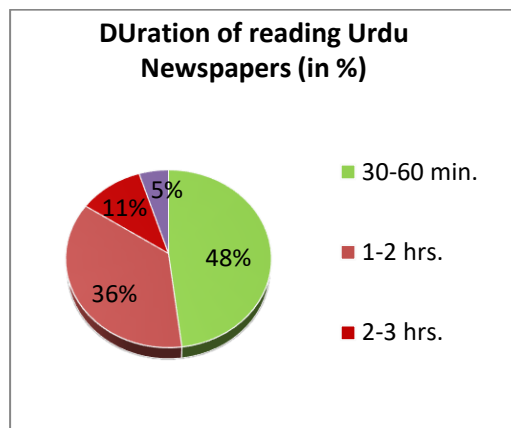
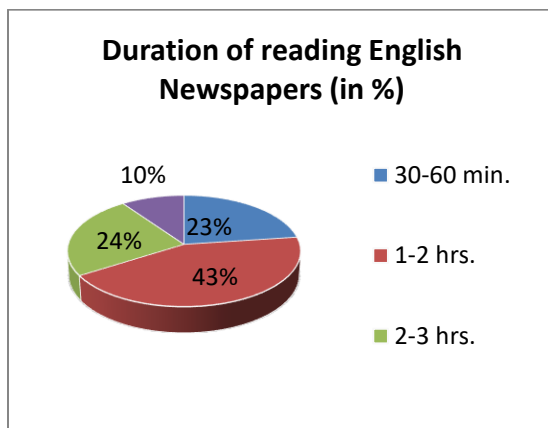
- iii. **Media Convergence Theory:** Convergence means coming together of different media on a single platform. The theory of convergence suggests that new technologies bring together different mediums and consequently redefine the media. This change in communication patterns and technologies reform the everyday life changing the patterns of creation and consumption of information. The concept of Convergence was propounded by Henry Jenkins in his book “Convergence Culture”. According to Jenkins, convergence is both a “top-down” and “bottom-up” phenomenon. In his book, Jenkins explains convergence as: “By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want..... In the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms” (Jenkins, 2006).

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

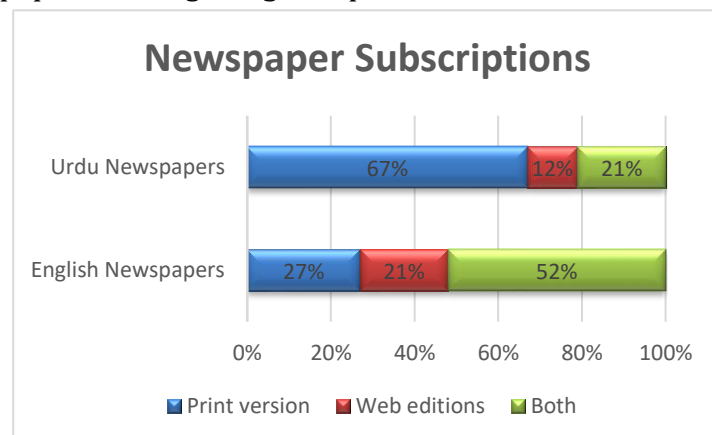
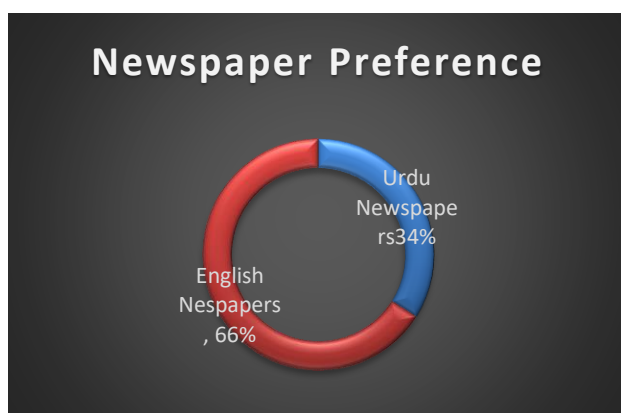
- The majority of Kashmiris like reading English newspapers over Urdu publications. In Kashmir, more than 76% of readers read English-language newspapers. The Urdu newspapers only have 51% of this percentage.



- English newspaper readers read their chosen publications for longer than Urdu newspaper readers. This implies that English newspapers are more engaging than Urdu newspapers in terms of quality and diversity and hold readers' attention for longer.

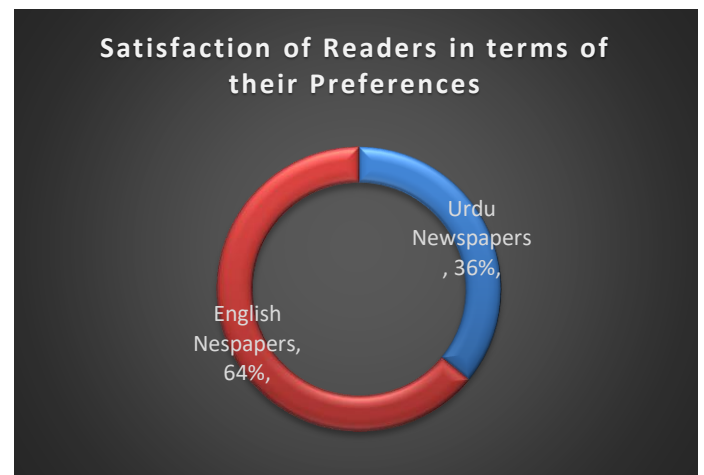
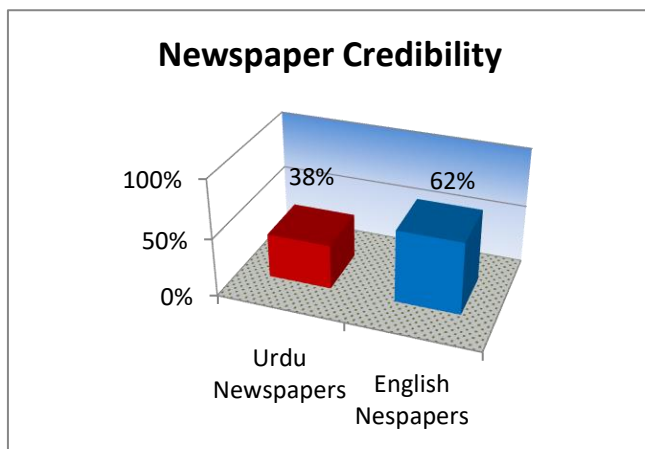


- A regular subscription to their chosen newspapers is obtained by 66% of English newspaper readers and 46% of Urdu newspaper readers. The fact that older generations make up the bulk of Urdu newspaper subscribers shows that younger generations are less interested in Urdu publications. The majority of Urdu newspaper readers (67%) read their preferred newspapers through regular print editions,



whereas the majority of English newspaper readers (52%) read their preferred publications both in print and online. This is due to the fact that English newspapers' online versions are significantly more developed than those of Urdu publications.

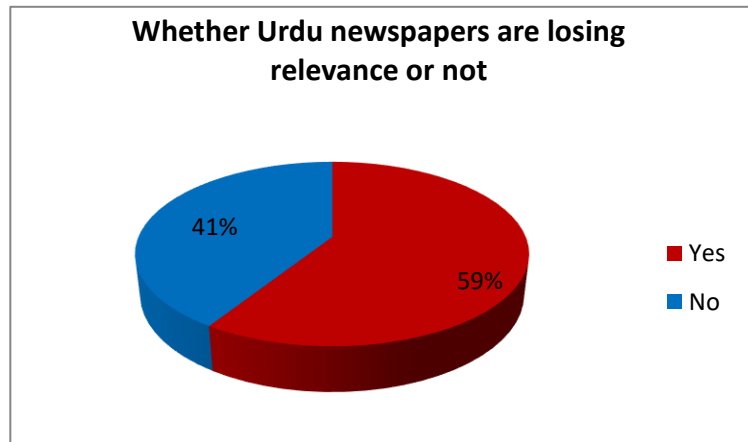
- Because they are more diversified and of higher quality, English newspapers are preferred by the majority of readers who read newspapers in both languages. While just 34% of respondents said they read Urdu newspapers, 66% of respondents said they prefer to read English newspapers.
- English newspapers once again take the top spot in terms of reader satisfaction (64%), while only 36% of readers choose Urdu publications. For the English and Urdu publications, the ratio is 62:38 in terms of reliability and the calibre of editorials and viewpoints.



- The credibility of the Urdu newspapers was also found less than that of the English newspapers. Only 38% of readers think Urdu media are more reputable, compared to 62% who think English newspapers are. Readers are more appreciative of the English newspapers' coverage of many issues than of the Urdu newspapers' coverage.



- According to 59% of respondents, English newspapers are significantly superior to Urdu newspapers, and reader interest in Urdu is likewise dwindling. According to 41% of readers, Urdu publications are still relevant and play a significant role in the Valley's media landscape.



### Findings from Interviews:

The fate of Urdu publications in Kashmir seems to worry the experts. The majority of them think that Urdu newspapers, which were the first forms of journalism in Kashmir and have been the only sources of news for more than 50 years, are rapidly losing the trust of their readers for a variety of reasons. Apart from few newspapers the circulation of most newspapers is dismal; though this holds true for most English newspapers as well but the number of Urdu newspapers is still far more than the English ones. Although Urdu publications still have a higher overall circulation than English newspapers, each newspaper is rapidly losing readers. The main causes of readers' apathy in Urdu newspapers are a lack of qualified staff, an inability to keep up with technological improvements and competition from English-language media, a progressive drop in the use of Urdu in Kashmir, and the same old conventional ways of doing business. Following are some key observations made by the experts during their interviews for the study in relation to the variables they were given:

- **Readership and Circulation:**

Due to their poor content quality, inability to compete effectively with English newspapers, and failure to keep up with new technology developments, Urdu newspapers are rapidly losing subscribers. The Urdu media is losing readers as a result of the young readers' escapism, and the reduction in readership eventually affects the circulation of Urdu newspapers.

- **Quality of Content:**

These newspapers lack competent and organised staffs, which affects their quality, unlike English newspapers like Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir. They mostly rely on news agency subscriptions, and the majority of the thoughts and pieces they publish are of poor calibre. Beat reporting, which is the fundamental strength of English newspapers, is almost absent from Urdu media.

- **Institutionalisation of Urdu newspapers:**

Institutionalisation is one of the biggest challenges Urdu newspapers are facing. The majority of Urdu newspaper organisations lack skilled reporters and expert personnel because they are run by the owner and editor. The majority of those who work for Urdu publications are part-timers who also have other jobs to undertake, which lowers the quality of their work. Because they feel taken advantage of by these Urdu newspapers, quality reporters and newcomers favour English media. They receive pitiful compensation for their work, and despite their efforts, they still receive no credit.

- **State of the Urdu language (Public and Political treatment):**

Urdu language is facing challenges in Kashmir. Youth are losing interest in Urdu as a result of the language's abandonment in private schools. Additionally, the language, although being the official language of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, is being treated even worse by the government and is only used for limited official activities and revenue records; all other official matters are being conducted in English. Regarding the future of the Urdu language and subsequently the Urdu Press, this presents a greater challenge.

- **Impact of New Media Technologies:**

The biggest challenge to the continued survival of Urdu publications is digital platforms. The majority of websites are difficult to read as a result of the poorly developed Urdu software and font. The latest media technologies are difficult for the Urdu publications to adopt. Most Urdu newspapers lack properly established websites, social media tool use, new smart phone Apps, convergence strategies, and other elements, which poses a severe threat to their survival in these cutthroat times.

- **Competition with English Media:**

English newspapers, which are advancing quickly and competing head-to-head with Urdu newspapers as far as modern trends and technology are concerned, are well ahead of the former. English newspapers are setting the trend when it comes to everything from writing style to website design and development to employee management. Because of this, readers like reading English newspapers than Urdu ones.

- **Role of Academic Institutions:**

Younger readers now concentrate more on English newspapers due to the bad state of the Urdu language in academic institutions. They find it extremely difficult to read Urdu and it takes them hours to read a single page, which usually takes five to ten minutes. Additionally, Urdu journalism is given less attention at the graduate level in universities and institutes that teach mass communication. All of these elements eventually had an impact on Kashmir's first Urdu newspapers, which were pioneers in the field of journalism.

Overall, current readers who are dynamic in their content selection, presentation, distribution of different news items by beats and areas, and space for reader feedback and write-ups are not drawn to the Urdu newspapers.

## **CONCLUSION**

Urdu Press in Kashmir has experienced many highs and lows since its inception, but by conducting courageous operations, it has always triumphed. In the last ten years or so, Urdu language journalism in the Kashmir valley has once again run across severe difficulties, and its survival is in danger. After years of Urdu publications experiencing multiple losses, English newspapers have suddenly started to take control of the discourse. Fundamentally, the Urdu language has deteriorated, and Urdu newspapers are having trouble retaining readers. Due to the large influx of private schools, the apathy of the public and government sectors, and the effects of globalization, the Urdu language is in grave danger, and English has taken over as the primary language.

The Urdu newspaper organizations don't have the attributes of a typical media company. These newspapers have long held sway in the journalism industry, but they haven't succeeded in becoming institutionalized structures that can withstand rising reader demands and market competition. These newspapers have typically been one-man operations, since they have never had this institutionalization. These newspapers, which are run by the owner and editor, lack a well-organized and competent workforce. As a result of their perceptions of being taken advantage of by these Urdu newspapers, quality reporters and newcomers favour English media. They receive pitiful compensation for their labour and, despite their efforts, receive neither recognition nor by-lines.

The new technology developments that have emerged gradually over the past two or three decades have not been embraced by the Urdu publications. Because of how inadequately developed the websites of the Urdu media are, readers immediately give up reading the online content of these newspapers. The graphics are not appealing, and the text is difficult to read. Even though several Urdu-language websites are currently growing quickly, most newspaper organizations, particularly in Kashmir, are still in their infancy. English publications are taking advantage of this circumstance and attempting to gain momentum in every way they can. They are far more organized, have better people working for them, and are of higher quality than Urdu newspapers, making them far superior in terms of reader satisfaction. The Kashmiri Urdu newspapers, which formerly stood for excellence and journalism, are only still in business because to their illustrious pasts and lack of current value.

## **Recommendations:**

1. In order to provide quality to readers and encourage them to continue reading these newspapers, these Urdu publications urgently need to shed their personality-driven approach and evolve into sophisticated companies. They must view their organisations more as institutions providing public services than as just commercial enterprises.
2. The state needs to put forth some effort to revive the Urdu language. Promotion of this language at the educational level, raising public awareness through discussions and seminars for both the general public and journalists, and eventually turning the tide for Urdu newspapers can all help restore the language's lost legacy.
3. Senior journalists need to take the lead in transforming these organisations into more intricate ones. To increase new journalists' and media students' interest in Urdu media, they must conduct counselling sessions with them.
4. To foster interest in Urdu journalism in the minds of aspiring journalists, media organisations like MERC and others must place a specific emphasis on it.
5. The re-emergence of Urdu newspapers as the standard bearers of journalism in Kashmir can only be facilitated by improvements in quality, incorporation of emerging trends like Convergence, multimedia tools, social media, better content and layout, the availability of space to common people, and the hiring of qualified personnel.

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