

Why Read Newspapers? (or Why Are They Still So Popular?)

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2009/07/14/why-read-newspapers-or-why-are-the-still-so-popular/

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They are supposed to be toast but newspapers are actually remarkably resilient. [Alex Linde](#) has asked [Why Read Newspapers](#) and answers: 'marketing'. He suggests they have no future. I think that is only partly true and the real story is elsewhere: [Why Are They Still So Popular?](#)

I often write the [Media Guardian's monthly article on Newspaper sales figures](#). The story has stayed pretty consistent over the last few years with annual falls of about 5% but that is from a high base of readership and revenue in the early 1980s.

Even if you put aside newspapers sales growth globally and especially in places like India, they are still a big media product. Considering the competition from TV, magazine, radio and now the Internet, it is amazing that they still sell in their 100,000s or millions in the UK and that they completely dominate the news agenda.



In the West newspaper sales have been declining from way before the Internet, but they remained generally profitable or at least sustainable. Now the real economic crisis for newspapers is simply one of advertising. It is going online. And rarely to news.

Their relative continued popularity with the public is partly because of tradition and legacy and partly convenience. They are a better package of information than ever before. And not everyone wants everything all the time right now. Most people don't live their news consumption lives in every instant. Real people have other stuff to do, so don't mind if their paper is a little out of date.

But the real reason for their relative popularity is entertainment. Just as I find Twitter fun and stimulating, so newspaper readers enjoy the diverse experience of reading a paper. And they value the sense of community. If I am a middle Englander then I get a warm glow from the sense of identity I share with the Daily Mail. Online, newspapers find that harder to achieve, while a blogger usually offers a narrower, if more intense and interactive experience.

In the end, there is a lot of value left in newspapers in a journalistic and even business and social sense. They still earn far more than online news. It's just they don't make a profit (but neither does YouTube). I am amazed that no national UK newspaper has gone bust recently, even though nearly all are operating at a loss.

So they are not toast yet, though the smell of burning is starting to drift out of the kitchen.

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