

Do you know how a newspaper reaches you?

A Case Study of Newspaper Circulation in New Delhi



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This paper makes an enquiry which we often ignore. It attempts to explore how a newspaper actually reaches our doorstep every morning without failure throughout the year. One would often think of this query as trivial. After all it is the news that matters; why worry how it reaches us? But it is important to realise that news is of no use if it is not told, and if not told in a timely manner. Newspapers fulfil both of these functions. However that doesn't make them any different. What makes newspapers interesting from any other news-carrier is perhaps the way it carries news.

Unlike the digitized media that works at an electrifying pace, newspapers use the human chain to travel up to you. Technology in newspaper circulation is limited but the mechanism works miraculously as efficiently as any other news-carrier. Perhaps, it is this efficiency that has contributed fundamentally with other factors in making newspapers sustain the competitive edge with other sources of media. And it is this that makes Newspaper Circulation, worth an area of study.

The present paper investigates Newspaper Circulation by taking the case study of New Delhi. The choice of Delhi is made for two reasons: first, because of a familiarity with the city, and second, because it is one of the biggest newspaper markets in India, in terms of publishing, circulation, readability, ratio to population and various such indices. A glimpse inside the capital's market reveals significant insights into the industry.

Thus this paper justifies 'why' it studies newspapers, newspaper circulation and newspaper circulation in Delhi. At 'what' level it executes this research is largely exploratory. And 'how' it goes about it is primarily based on ploughing-the-field approach i.e. gathering first-hand information by conducting exhaustive field trips, face-to-face interactions with the actual players on the field, numerous interviews with participants off the field, examining the various issues concerning the industry, the problems within and perfectness without. Thus by addressing such queries, this paper culminates in an attempt to find out how a newspaper reaches us.

1. Acknowledgement

This paper was written during a six week Research Reality: Summer Internship Program, 2011 organized by the Centre for Civil Society (CCS), New Delhi. I am extremely thankful to CCS for allowing me to be curious and to go full length to explore my queries. I am indebted to the entire CCS team especially the Program Co-coordinators and CCS associated members for providing a rich and fun-loving learning environment which encouraged me to explore beyond classroom knowledge. More than anything it was the small coffee time chats with the very learned staff members which were a constant source of encouragement and personal guidance.

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Most importantly, this paper would not have gained shape had it not been for the overwhelming interactions I had with the various vendors and newspaper company officials at the Nehru Place newspaper depot during the rush hour. I have no words to thank the generosity and humility with which they allowed this intervention to carry on. It was more than an experience to be at the ground level and explore things. And lastly, it was Papa who disturbed his sleeps each time to make the trips to the Nehru Place depot happen.

2. Introduction

Newspaper reading is a habit. But what happens when you do not find a newspaper? This is a peculiar situation which this author faced one fine morning. As this morning ritual got delayed it first caused anxiety, then desperation and finally frustration. Immediately she rang her newspaper *wala* to complain and within the next few minutes a delivery boy zoomed on his bicycle and swung a newspaper roll unmistakably darted towards her balcony. That settled the problem once and for all.

Delivery boys always dutifully patrol the lane each morning at the exact hour shooting rubber stringed newspaper batons, impeccably aimed at their destined balconies. This impression stayed with the author. Some days later it was retrieved when she inquisitively asked her fellow mate, “Do you know how a Newspaper reaches you?” The friend grinned and remained puzzled. This response was important because it made it ideal for a research topic. A research question should be such that it first breaks the responder into a grin out of curiosity and then it should provoke him to think deeper to make it worth studying. This is how the present paper came to have the question it does.

Once the research question was chosen it then had to be theorized. In order to better answer the research question which this paper has undertaken, two simple questions were identified, they are: What is so special about newspaper circulation? and How do we study it? Two simple answers to these questions, which comprise the key elements of this paper are provided: one, newspaper circulation is very unique by various standards. It is the manner in which such a huge task is performed so efficiently that makes it special from any other industry; and two, we can study this real life phenomenon with both theoretical and qualitative practical exercise. This broadly remains the framework of this essay. In the following part of this section, each of these two elements will be elaborated upon.

2.1 What is so special about Newspaper circulation?

Let us first attempt to answer this question, which broadly implies: Why is newspaper circulation unique and what is so unique about it? The answer is divided into two parts. At the first instance, what strikes first about the process of newspaper circulation is that it appears to work like a six sigma company. With minimum resources it obtains the maximum results. It looks like an anomaly of the famous dabba *walas* in Mumbai¹. The first part of this query attempts to construct such an analogy of the dabba *walas* in Mumbai with the newspaper *walas* in Delhi. This would help illustrate how similar and significant both the systems are. The second part of this query would brief on how big is the newspaper market in Delhi. This would enable it to locate the importance of the newspaper *walas* who perform such a huge task so efficiently.

The process of newspaper delivery by the newspaper *walas* in Delhi – or for that matter in any other city of our country – is roughly very similar to the process of tiffin delivery by the dabba *walas* in Mumbai. Both these industries perform door-to-door delivery. Both cover an area of around 50kms of diameter of their respective cities. The dabba *walas* include 5000 employees to deliver 2,00,000 tiffins² which brings their employee-to-tiffin delivery ratio to 1:200. A similar ratio of employee-to-newspaper can be

¹Pawan G. Agrawal, *The Wonder of Dabba walas unfolded*. This presentation was made during his PhD research on the ‘Study of Logistic and Supply Chain Management of Dabbawala in Mumbai’ at the Agrawal Institute of Management, Mumbai.

²The business of dabba *walas* involves tiffin delivery to-and-fro i.e. 2,00,000 tiffins at a time and 4,00,000 transactions both ways per day.

accepted to be applicable for newspaper delivery which marginally varies between 150-250 newspapers per newspaper *wala* each day³. Inversely it can be comfortably supposed that there are almost 15,000 newspaper vendors in Delhi⁴ who deliver around 30,00,000 copies per day⁵. Technological backup of both the dabba *walas* and newspaper *walas* is nil. Newspaper delivery boys manually sort their newspaper copies and are popularly seen on bicycles during delivery. Cost of their service is normally based on the cover price of newspaper which is not more than Rs 100-300 per month on an average, depending upon the number and type of newspaper ordered. This is again very much in the same range as the dabba *walas* who charge Rs 300 per month for their service. As per the weight carried, distance travelled and space covered this earns the standard price for all. Interestingly in a city where unions are generally very strong, the dabba *walas* never had a strike, because each one is a shareholder in the business. Unlike them, newspaper *walas* in Delhi have witnessed a major strike for two days in 2003-4⁶ and a few minor strikes confined to small groups in a few depots which go barely noticed⁷. Annual turnover of the industry may run into crores and the average per capita earning of a vendor may be around Rs 4000 per month⁸ as similar to the dabba *walas*.

However, the most critical feature in both these systems is time, which they consume for not more than 3 hours for the entire period of operation per day. In case of the dabba *walas* the working hours are between 10:30-2:30pm and in the case of newspaper *walas* it is even more

³ Interview, Mukesh, newspaper delivery boy, Nehru Place depot, 2 July 2011. He delivers 250 copies every morning in the Kailaji C-Block area in New Delhi.

Interview, Suraj Tiwari, newspaper delivery boy, Nehru Place depot, 17 July 2011. He delivers 100 copies every morning to 60-70 households in the Greater Kailash area in New Delhi.

Interview, Sudhir Chaudhari, President Nehru Place Newspaper Distributor Association, Nehru Place depot, 8 July 2011. Responding to a query he said that one of the challenges of delivering newspapers in the morning is that the delivery boys often meet minor accidents on their way to delivery because of overloading of newspapers in their basket which ideally should not exceed 250. It normally remains between 100-200 copies per delivery boy.

⁴ Interview, Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, New Delhi, 24 June 2011.

⁵ This figure is speculative as original figures recorded by the Registrar of Newspapers India (RNI) and the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) remain unavailable for public use.

⁶ Interview, Anonymous, newspaper VDR, Nehru Place depot, 19 July 2011. He recalled that an all out strike was declared by the vendors at the Nehru Place depot in February 2003 or 2004 against the Economic Times (ET) belonging to the Times of India group. They demanded an increase in commission of up to 30% on the cover price of the ET in confirmation with the general norm. However this strike could not continue for long.

⁷ Interview, Sri Kant Pandey, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011. He informed that a strike was declared against the Business Standard for paying less commission up to 20% on 8 July 2011. However the strike broke out for only that particular morning when the company salesman announced less commission for the day. It failed and hardly went noticed.

⁸ Interview, Praveen Singh, Area Circulation Manager, HT, Nehru Place depot, 23 June 2011. He emphatically said that the newspaper vendors have a deceiving appearance. Their earning may easily range between Rs 5000 - 50,000 a month.

Interview, Vinod Kumar Sharma, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 30 June 2011. He disclosed his earning to be around Rs 4000 per month from a sale of 250 copies daily in the Tughlakabad area. He distributes almost seven varieties of newspapers ranging from the popular English dailies to the Indian-language newspapers. He said that most of the vendors perform delivery on a part-time basis and remain small players like him earning almost the same as he.

arduous between 4:00-7:00am at max, though usually it gets over by 6:00am. Plus the latter work even on Sundays, and barely enjoy two holidays in an entire a year⁹.

Another critical feature of the newspaper and dabba *walas* is their error rate. The dabba *walas* hold reputation of making less than 1 error in 16million transactions. The newspaper *walas* too are hardly mistaken. There are barely two kinds of error they can make: either miss the delivery to a reader or deliver the wrong newspaper. They are never heard of delivering an older newspaper or irregularly delivering newspaper for days. The mistakes that the newspaper vendors make are very minor and get easily resolved by contacting the vendor. Thus, with negligible fuel costs, modern technology or investment they achieve almost 100% customer satisfaction.

Thus judging on a host of parameters based on the dabba *walas* in Mumbai we know how the newspaper *walas* in Delhi are similarly remarkable. However, they also share important differences which become the characteristic features of their systems. Let us consider three prominent features.

First, the dabba *walas* have a highly organized system of working, in which there is a strong central authority comprising a hierarchy of employees who run the entire system. They have a President at the top, followed by a Vice- President, General Secretary, Treasurer, Directors (9), Mukadam and finally Members (5000). The newspaper *walas* in Delhi on the other hand, have no such central body governing their business. Here everyone is a king. In the name of an organization, the least that they have is a vendor's union¹⁰ which too becomes active only selectively like in times of disputes and grievance redressal. Thus the newspaper *walas* in Delhi remain a large unorganized sector.

Second, the dabba *walas* use a particular form of colour coding to segregate their delivery assignments as per the delivery destination. The newspaper *walas* on the other hand, do not follow any such coding pattern. A delivery boy fulfils his delivery criteria only by remembering which newspapers he had to deliver where. Some early birds do maintain a list of their delivery orders. But that remains only a temporary measure which they abandon once they become equipped. Otherwise it slows down their speed of operation rather than simplifying it¹¹.

⁹ Newspaper vendors in Delhi have one day holiday each on Holi and Diwali each year. This holiday is not decided by the government but is a convention amongst the vendors.

¹⁰ In New Delhi the Newspaper vendor's union works at two levels: the depot level and the region level. At the depot level these unions are present only where the depots are large enough. For example, there is the Nehru Place Newspaper Distributors Association at Nehru Place where 160 vendors work each day. At the regional level, there is the South Delhi Newspaper Distributors Association, North Delhi Newspaper Distributors Association and West Delhi Newspaper Distributors Association. 5 years back, the East Delhi Newspaper Distributors Association merged with its South Delhi counterpart. However none of these unions is known to be working properly. They often have self assigned leaders who enjoy their position through popular consensus rather than any organized system of elections.

¹¹ Interview, Sri Kant Pandey, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011. He told that in cases where large orders have to be delivered, the newspaper vendor prepares separate bundles of the demanded copies marking the readers address on the first page. These are then carried by the delivery boy for delivery who gains help from these markings. However this practice remains confined only to the orders which are sent to offices or libraries which demand almost 5-10 newspapers per day. This practice also depends upon the choice of a particular vendor and the understanding between him and his delivery boy.

Interview, Anil (35), newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011. On Sundays, he stamps the bundle of newspapers sent to offices with the seal of the newspaper agency he runs. However, he does this to make sure that respective office recognizes his service done even on holidays and does not deducts his payment as offices remain closed on those days.

Third, the supply chain of tiffin and newspaper delivery has slight variations too. In case of the dabba *walas* in Mumbai, the delivery of tiffins is done via a chain mechanism. Each employee delivers certain number of tiffins from a specific source to a specific destination point which falls within the overall delivery route of those particular set of tiffins. Thus every dabba *wala* is part of the delivery chain. There is an Executive Committee of 5 members each of who oversees a team of 20-25 members who individually collect tiffins from homes, deliver to offices and back. They thus have several points of meeting in a delivery route where the collection and sorting of tiffins takes place. Unlike them, newspaper delivery takes place in a convection pattern where a single delivery boy alone is responsible for the delivery of a particular set of newspaper from the final source¹² to the final destination i.e. a particular delivery boy accompanies the set of his assigned newspaper right from the depot to the reader always. Thus there are no multiple points of aggregation and sorting within the route from the depot to the reader, rather there are only multiple depots from where newspapers are delivered in the same pattern.

Each of these differences between the dabba *walas* and the newspaper *walas* is a particularity of their systems. These are practices which they have adopted out of convenience and requirement of their particular industry. At the end of the day, these differences do not subtract from but rather enhance their delivery mechanism. The point is that after noticing the similarities and considering the differences between the dabba *walas* and the newspaper *walas* in Delhi, it would be in the least wrong to suggest that the newspaper *walas* are an industry as remarkable as the dabba *walas* which is a six sigma company. The newspaper circulation in Delhi is indeed a unique system which this paper attempts to study.

Let us now consider the second part of the query which was considered at the beginning of this section which was to know how big the market of newspaper circulation in Delhi is. This will help understand the significance of the newspaper *walas* who perform this enormous task so efficiently.

India's market for newspapers is enormous and highly dynamic. In recent years especially since 2005 it has seen immense growth. According to a report by PriceWaterCoopers (PWC) the market of Indian media and entertainment has been growing annually by about 13% in 2005-9 and is predicted to grow by almost 12.4% over 2010-14. Print Media (comprising of newspapers and magazines) saw a growth of 10.2% CAGR or Rs 161.5 billion in 2005-9 and would continue to rise by 7.4% or Rs 230.5 billion in 2010-14. Specifically newspaper publishing which fell by almost 11.4 per cent globally would contrarily grow at 6.8% in 2010-14 in India i.e. from a Rs 143 billion industry in 2009 it would become a Rs 198 billion industry by 2014¹³.

According to the report of World Association of Newspapers (WAN), 2008, 20 out of 100 world's largest circulating newspapers were from India¹⁴. The circulation of these 20 newspapers alone comprised almost 17% of the world market. In fact the total number of newspapers in circulation in India has jumped by more than 100% in the past decade from 12,69,60,000 in 2000¹⁵ to 25,79,53,373 in 2009¹⁶.

¹² Here the 'final source' refers to the depots where a delivery boy obtains his lot of newspapers for the first time in the supply chain. A delivery boy may get his lot from the vendor for whom he may be working as an employee or he may be both a vendor and a delivery boy at the same time.

¹³ PriceWaterCoopers, *India entertainment and media outlook 2014,2010*

¹⁴ According to the *List of Newspapers in the World by Circulation*. Information accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspapers_in_the_world_by_circulation

¹⁵ [Taberez Ahmed Neyazi](#), *Why are newspapers thriving in India?* Opinion Asia: Global Views on Asia. Information accessed at <http://opinionasia.com/node/880>

India at present has 365million newspaper readers¹⁷. This continues to increase remarkably and would continue in comparison to the scenario in the rest of the world. It would be rather interesting to note that the total number of newspaper circulation in the United States, according to the data presented by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), 2011 was barely 5,07,03,346 copies¹⁸, which is less than one-fifth of its Indian counterpart in 2009. PWC report rather predicts that due to the recent economic recession, newspaper market in US would continue to fall by 2.6% CAGR up till 2014 and would shrink to a barely US\$ 34billion industry¹⁹. Thus newspapers have a very bright future in India and certainly in New Delhi.

According to the data of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), 2009, 9,961 out of 73,146 newspaper in India were registered in New Delhi constituting almost 13.5% of the total.²⁰ According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS), Quarter 1, 2011, newspaper readership rate in India for the top 10 newspaper was 9,63,69,000²¹ and the same for top 10 newspaper in New Delhi/NCR was 1,86,92,000²² comprising almost 19% of the total. According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), 2011, the annual newspaper circulation of four major newspaper in New Delhi figures to almost 18,40,242²³.

Thus we have a rough estimate of how big is the newspaper market in New Delhi or rather how big is the role played by the newspaper *walas* in Delhi. In fact their role would continue to become all the more important as it is apparent that the newspaper market would continue to expand in India and in New Delhi in the future.

Thus this section culminates at the point of establishing – what makes newspaper circulation so special?

2.2 How is the study undertaken?

This paper is driven out of simple curiosity. It tries to ask small questions like: Where does a newspaper come from? Who brings it? How is it brought? How it is delivered to our places? How does it all happen in such a timely manner? Does it ever fail? What drives it so accurately? Is there everything accurate about it or are there problems? What are these problems? How are

¹⁶ According to the Registrar of Newspapers for India, Press in India Highlights for the year 2008-9 as recorded up till 31st March 2009. Information accessed at <https://rni.nic.in/welcome.html>

¹⁷ PriceWaterCoopers, *India entertainment and media outlook 2014,2010*

¹⁸ According to the *List of Newspapers in United States by Circulation*. Information accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_newspapers_in_the_United_States_by_circulation

¹⁹ PriceWaterCoopers, *India entertainment and media outlook 2014,2010*

²⁰ According to the Registrar of Newspapers for India, Press in India Highlights for the year 2008-9 as recorded up till 31st March 2009. Information accessed at <https://rni.nic.in/welcome.html>

²¹ According to the Indian Readership Survey 2011 Q1, *Topline Findings*. The top 10 newspapers in India were (in descending order): Dainik Jagran, Dainik Bahskar, Hindustan, Malyala Manorama, Amar Ujala, Lokmat, Times of India, Daily Thanti, Rajasthan Patrika and Matrabhumi.

²² According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2011, the circulation figures of three newspapers in New Delhi/NCR, which are amongst the city's top ten newspapers according to the Indian Readership Survey 2011 Q1, *Topline Findings* are (in descending order): Hindustan Times (8,98,740), Times of India, (8,56,172) and Dainik Jagran (17,784).

they resolved? What is the scenario at present? What makes this industry different from others or is it the same?

The manner in which this paper goes about exploring these questions is by undertaking rigorous theoretical and practical exercises on the theme. The beginning was made by exploring the theoretical domain. A bibliography was prepared. An in-depth study of a host of scholarly articles was performed and rigorous internet searches done. The information about these is listed towards the end of the paper. However, these could only remain a secondary source for the paper not only because they were literary sources but also because they lacked what the practical experience could provide.

It was actual experience of being at the ground level which became the essence of this paper. Almost six field trips were made each morning at around 4am to the Nehru Place newspaper depot because it was the nearest site available to witness the action. More than 50 interviews were conducted many of which comprise barely five minute chats. All of these were face-to-face interactions mainly at the Nehru Place depot or at the offices of the concerned newspaper officials and very few were conducted over phone or email. The interviewees were the various vendors, delivery boys, newspaper company officials, newspaper salesmen, shopkeepers, scrap dealers and anonymous individuals holding no formal designation of any kind.

A host of questions were asked to them about everything and anything about newspapers and newspaper circulation in Delhi. The typical ones were out of inquisitiveness like who they were, how old were they into the newspaper business, what newspapers did they deliver, how many and in which areas of the city, what were their problems about it and what were their other concerns etc. A mine of information was gathered this way. These field trips became invaluable because they were not only the heart of data but because they allowed the development of personal knowledge of one another which made this paper go beyond research and to become personally meaningful.

The biggest challenge in undertaking this paper was first, the unavailability of data on the topic and second, the difficulty of assimilating the data that was gathered about it. Literary sources for this paper remain helpful only to an extent. None of them were found to deal appropriately in the query which this paper has undertaken. Thus data for the theme remained largely unavailable. This paper thus ploughed the field by itself and tried to systematise the information it gained here. Large part of information was taken from the field experiences as is mentioned repeatedly. However, first-hand information such as these unwritten interviews remains unverifiable, which may weaken the quality of any research paper. However, taking the opportunity it needs to be asserted here that it is perhaps the nature of this paper which enriches from the ground information even though it remains unrecorded. Practical experience does not weaken, but rather strengthens this paper.

Thus this paper largely remains a descriptive paper on the manner in which newspaper circulation is carried out in Delhi and does not exclusively dedicate itself to academic analysis. Hence it tries to answer, how a newspaper reaches us. Accompany the main newspaper daily are published a day before. Similarly other feature supplements also get published a day in advance like: The Ascent of TOI which is available on Thursdays, advertisement features like those based on college admissions and even weekly newspapers like the Crest Edition of TOI. These are printed a day before because the content of their pages is such that it is not subjective to the last minute news changes. This is the reason that they are printed and bundled separately from the main paper and which have to be later inserted inside the main paper by the vendors. Separate content and separate printing renders the supplements as additions.

3.1.1 Printing

This is the heart of the entire activity that concerns us. This process completes itself within a matter of hours. Roughly from 10:00pm-3:00am every part that makes a newspaper is printed. This is not an all sum game. It takes places in different stages depending upon the importance of the pages to be printed and the distance at which those sets of newspapers are to be circulated.

As soon as the edited articles and the layout of the newspaper is received, templates are prepared for each page on brass metallic plates which are then used by the printing press for printing. The technology for printing has advanced manifold over several years especially after the 1970s, which was one of the main reasons why newspaper circulation shot up by over 140 per cent during 1967-88 which was the pre-liberalization period²⁴. Advancement in civic infrastructure, availability of internet, availability of templates for various scripts and increase in the speed of printing are other technological factors that have affected the growth of newspaper publication.

Once the templates are prepared the actual process of printing begins. This takes place in various stages depending upon: one, the priority of importance of the pages in a newspaper; and two, the distance where the newspaper is circulated. The entire process lasts for a matter of hours between 12:00-4:00am. This is generally the norm in most of the newspaper printing presses. Let us look at the stages of printing below.

Depending upon the priority of importance of the pages, excepting the front page all other pages of the newspaper are printed first. It is because the news to be printed in these pages is already ready. Amongst the page that is last published in a newspaper is the front page which is also the most crucial page of that paper. It gets printed at the last around 12:00-2:00am so that it can include the breaking news if one occurs at the late hour. With the printing of the front page the printing of all the pages of a day's newspaper is complete. Then begins the process of newspaper printing according to the print order of the day.

Every newspaper company estimates its print-order for each day. The print-order of a newspaper depends upon various factors like: subscription rate of the newspaper, the daily demand of copies which it receives from the vendors and agents a day before, popularity of the newspaper which allows it to print more extra copies, the outbreak of a sensational event which provokes curiosity amongst public, season of the year which impacts newspaper circulation like rain and summer vacations when the demand falls and several other.

Subscription based copies in a newspaper company's daily print order may vary from less than five per cent in case of TOI²⁵ to more than 95 per cent in case of Mail Today²⁶. Revenue from subscription in Indian print media stands at US\$ 61.5 billion in 2009 and would grow by 5.6% up till 2014 to command an US\$ 80.5 billion share²⁷. Another major component of a newspaper company's daily print order comprises the updates on demand which the vendors inform the company's salesmen every morning at

²⁴ Robin Jeffrey. *Indian Language Newspapers and Why They Grow*. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 28, No. 38 (Sep. 18, 1993), pp. 2004.

²⁵ Interview, Rajesh Dutt, Sr. Manager, Results & Market Development, Bennet, Coleman & Co. Ltd (BCCL), Nehru Place Newspaper depot, 10 July 2011.

²⁶ Interview, Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, New Delhi, 24 June 2011.

²⁷ PriceWaterCoopers, *India entertainment and media outlook 2014,2010*

the depots during their purchase of newspaper from them. The agents²⁸ who deal in the distribution of large numbers of newspapers inform about their next day's demand generally towards the evening to the circulation department officials in the company. Thus the demand of newspapers is revised on a daily basis.

Over and above the print order the Newspaper companies also print extra copies of their paper, taking into account the daily fluctuation in their demand. For example, out of the roughly 23,000 copies of TOI dispatched to the Nehru Place newspaper depot each day around 200 copies are extra²⁹. These extra copies are often printed considering the curiosity which builds amongst the general public about a particular event that has been in news recently. For instance, the sales of newspapers had shot up marginally when Anna Hazare's fast and 2G Spectrum scam hit the bulletins. Other seasonal factors influencing a newspaper's print order remain minor.

According to the print order the printing of newspapers then starts, depending upon the distance in which they are to be circulated. First, the up-country edition is printed followed by the city edition. The earliest bulk of printed newspapers are sent as up-country edition to those areas of demand which comprise regions outside the city of publication. In case of large newspaper firms the circulation of these newspapers is supervised by a separate department within the department of circulation. For example, the TOI Delhi edition is read in the hilly regions of north India where it often reaches a day late and in other metro cities where the edition is particularly ordered. The supervision of these copies comes under the department of up-country editions in the Bennet, Coleman & Co. Ltd (BCCL). (More on this in the following section 3.1.4. Packaging done manually)

Then follows the printing of newspapers of the city edition within which they are to be circulated. The circulation of these copies within Delhi is one of the most challenging task which this paper aims to explore. Amongst the top three English dailies published and circulated within New Delhi are: the HT with 8,98,740 copies, the TOI with 8,56,172 copies and The Hindu with 17,784 copies daily³⁰. In case of newspaper firms with large CL such as these, the CL of the newspaper copies is undertaken by different departments within the main CL department of the company depending upon the type of readers they are catering. For example, in BCCL there are three departments which supervise CL of copies within the Delhi city: one, the City Sales department for common readers; two, the Institutions department for various organizations which take TOI group newspapers like five-star hotels, hospitals, airports, railway stations, VIP areas; and three, the NIE department which circulates copies to Delhi schools under the TOI's NIE programme³¹.

²⁸ There are two kinds of intermediaries in the process of newspaper circulation: one, the agent who deals in the distribution of large number of copies say, above 5000 per day; and the other intermediary is the vendor who deals in smaller number of copies. The agent thus acts like a wholesaler while the vendor behaves like a retailer in the newspaper distribution process.

²⁹ Interview, Rajesh Kalra, Salesman of TOI & ET and employee of Bharat Nidhi Ltd., NPND, 10 July 2011. The dispatch of extra copies of newspaper to a depot depends upon the importance of the depot in terms of the amount of circulation and advertisement revenues it can fetch.

³⁰ According to the According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), 2011.

³¹ NIE or Newspaper in Education is a program that the BBCL had begun as far as 10-15ys back to target the young reading population in schools and colleges. The aim of the program was to increase newspaper sales by sapping the reading habit of youngsters which would reap benefits in the long term. It was supposed that newspaper reading is habit in which the reader not only gets accustomed to the content of a newspaper but also its other attributes like font size, layout, feature sections etc. The NIE program aimed to encash this aspect of newspaper reading habit. Recently the NIE also bagged the World Young Reader Prize 2006 in the Newspapers in Education (NIE) category for its effective use of the newspaper as a teaching tool. Information accessed at *NIE more than a Newspaper*, Times of India, 25 October 2006, New Delhi Edition.

Once the printing press starts printing the day's order the packaging of newspapers is followed which may be done mechanically or manually. Newspapers are bundled together with strings in bunches, for example the bundle of main TOI newspaper includes 90 newspapers which are also wrapped in plastic for safety. The TOI salesman's pride on this additional care taken of the newspapers by their company saying, "humari company thoda professional kaam karti hai", unlike any other newspaper group³². The manual process of packaging then begins.

3.1.2 Packaging Done Manually

This involves the process of counting, bundling and uploading and issue of *challan*. All these processes are done manually in newspaper presses. These are performed in accordance to the depots to which they have to be dispatched in the city.

Counting here involves counting of newspaper bundles in accordance with the demand at the different newspaper depots in the city. Stipulated numbers of bundles of the main paper and the supplement are sorted to be sent to the respective depots. These are then uploaded into various wagons which then transport the newspapers to the concerned depots. Uploading into wagons is done by labour. The wagons which carry the newspapers to the depot usually have an annual contract with the newspaper firm. How many wagons actually carry these newspapers depends upon the number of newspapers a printing press prints and the distance of depots to which they have to be transported.

For example, TOI and HT have 72 depots all over Delhi. Rohini is the largest depot of TOI and Nehru Place is the largest depot of HT. At Nehru Place alone, HT has a daily dispatch of almost 27,000 copies as against 23,000 copies of TOI. Along with this TOI group also dispatches more than 6000 copies of ET and 7000 copies of Navbharat Times (NBT) daily at the Nehru Place newspaper depot. Due to such a large dispatch of newspapers both the companies dispatch an entire wagon dedicated to the Nehru Place newspaper depot. Similarly in cases of smaller and close by depots like Moolchand, Lajpat Nagar, South Ex etc. a single wagon may cover the entire route.

However, before the wagon leaves the printing press an important formality is fulfilled which is the issue of *challan*. *Challan* or receipts are issued at the press in the name of the salesman who would then be responsible for the circulation of the concerned number of copies at a particular depot. It is attached on top of each newspaper bundle and contains details like the number of copies of each newspaper dispatched, the depot to which they are dispatched, the mode of dispatch, the date and the name of the Salesman in authority³³. Once the wagon leaves the printing press for the depot, the newspaper completes one half of the journey. But the difficult part follows after this.

The HT also runs a similar program known as the PACE launched in 1994.

³² Interview, Rajesh Kalra, Salesman of TOI & ET and employee of Bharat Nidhi Ltd., NPND, 10 July 2011.

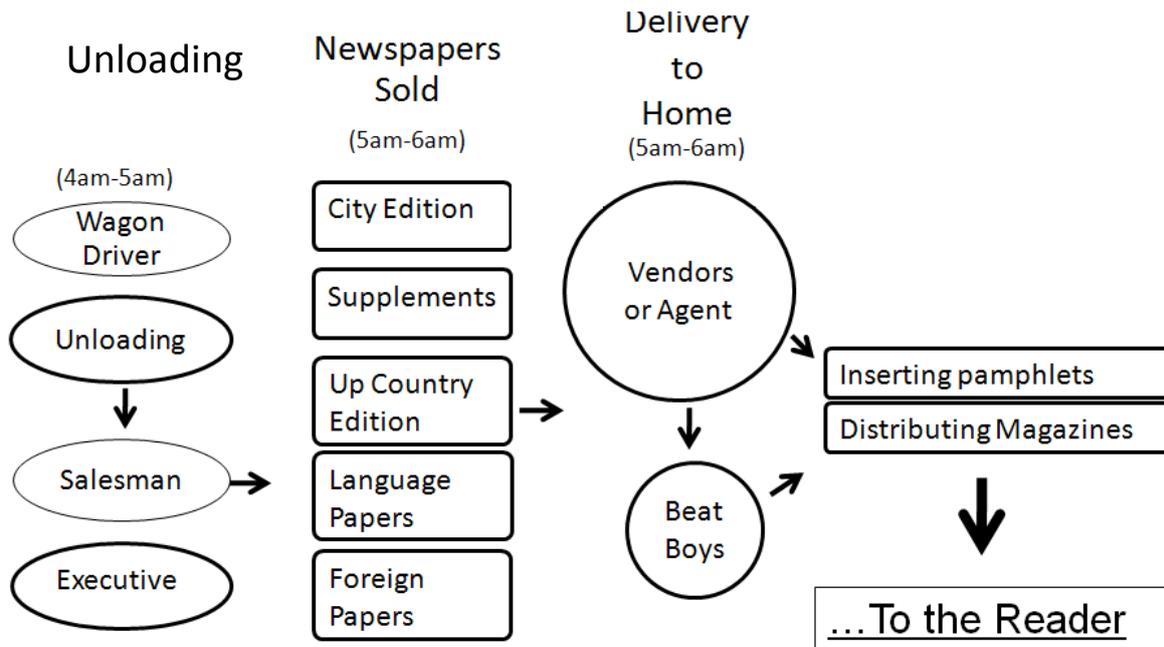
³³ Interview, Ravi, Assistant Vice President Marketing, Peacock Media Ltd., Malviya Nagar, 28 June 2011. He has worked in the circulation departments of some of the leading print media organizations Delhi like TOI having an experience of more than 10 years in the field.

Interview, Suresh Lal, Salesman Distributor of TOI & NBT and employee of Bharat Nidhi Ltd., Nehru Place newspaper depot, 10 July 2011.

Interview, Puran Chauhan, Assistant Manager, The Indian Express, Nehru Place newspaper depot, 17 July 2011.

3.2 From Depot to Door

This is the second half and the difficult half of the journey of a newspaper. The circulation of newspapers from the depots to the readers is entirely performed by the vendors. The depot is the actual site of action and the role of the newspaper Company remains only of selling and supervision.



3.2.1 Unloading

By 4:00-5:00am the wagons leave the printing press and reach the depots. They sometimes carry maps to guide their way. During this travelling period, the newspapers are only accompanied by the driver and at times by the labourers of the transport company. At the depot, the driver and his labour perform the task of unloading the newspaper bundles. They are responsible to make sure that they transport the copies in a timely manner to the depot and unload the exact number of copies they are supposed to³⁴. In case of shortage of newspapers at the depot, they are always suspected to have either unloaded more newspapers at some other depot or misplaced them on the way.

Unloading is supervised by the newspaper company’s salesman and sometimes the executive officers (in case of large newspaper firms) who join the depot at this hour every morning. How many salesmen and executives would attend a depot also depends upon the company’s decision. Again to take an example, large newspaper brands like TOI and HT have two salesmen and two circulation executives performing duty every day at the Nehru Place newspaper depot. Small brands or newspapers which have small

³⁴ The unloading point can also be a distribution site of a newspaper agent. As mentioned earlier, an agent behaves as a wholesaler in the newspaper DTB chain. He is given the prerogative by the newspaper company to get the demanded number of newspaper copies directly at his sit of choice if he may wish. For example, Mail Today distributes its newspapers in posh residential colonies in Gurgaon through agents to whom it directly transports newspapers through its Dispatch department. Information accessed from an Interview, Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, New Delhi, 24 June 2011.

circulation at Nehru Place do not send their executives each morning to the depot, unlike the salesmen who have to be present³⁵.

The salesman then takes charge of the bundles issued in his name. He is supposed to make sure that he receives the correct number of copies because the *challan* is issued in his name. In case where there is a shortage, he is supposed to immediately report to the executive and a chain of reporting is followed. For example, in case of the Indian Express, the circulation executive would inform about the shortage to a dispatch executive stationed at the circulation office, who would then inform the chief transporter, who would finally inquire with the concerned driver. If the fault lies with the driver, then the amount of the number of copies lost is deducted from his salary for the next month³⁶. In some other situations newspaper copies are requested from the nearest depot to meet shortages. For example, Moolchand depot acts as a buffer for the Nehru Place depot for TOI newspapers³⁷.

The main responsibility of a salesman is to sell the newspapers at the depot to the vendors. The salesman may not be an employee of the newspaper company whose newspapers he is assigned to sell. In other words, the newspaper companies often contract either other companies or individuals for the sale of their newspapers at different depots in the city. For example, the BCCL has a contract with Bharat Nidhi Ltd. to sell its newspapers within the Delhi city. Thus salesmen from the Bharat Nidhi Ltd. arrive at various depots early morning to perform the sale³⁸. In cases where a newspaper has low sales at a particular depot, the respective company contracts individuals to perform the task. Thus a salesman may also be seen selling newspapers of several companies to make a larger income.³⁹ This is often the case when a salesman trades in newspapers which are published outside the city and are transported from long distances for DTB within the city of demand. For example, Indian language newspapers and foreign newspapers which have small sale in Delhi are sold by salesmen who sell a variety of them⁴⁰. Often such salesmen are self-assigned individuals who enter the business by themselves.

These salesmen remain very vigilant and active at the time of performing sale to the vendors. They maintain register entries containing the name of the vendor whom they are selling, his demand of each variety of newspaper on the day, total payment, any scheme taken by the

³⁵ Interview, Narender Singh (48), Salesman of Mail Today, Statesman, Business Standard, Dainik Bhaskar and Aaj Samaj, NPND, 23 June 2011. He informed that each morning he sells and collects the amount obtained from selling these newspapers. It is only towards the afternoon or evening that the executives from the concerned companies arrive to receive the amount from him.

³⁶ Interview, Puran Chauhan, Assistant Manager, The Indian Express, Nehru Place newspaper depot, 17 July 2011.

³⁷ Interview, Ankit Chandi, circulation executive, Results & Market Development, BCCL, NPND, 10 July 2011.

³⁸ Interview, Ankit Chandi, circulation executive, Results & Market Development, BCCL, NPND, 10 July 2011.

Interview, Rajesh Kalra, Salesman of TOI & ET and employee of Bharat Nidhi Ltd., NPND, 10 July 2011.

Interview, Suresh Lal, Salesman Distributor of TOI & NBT and employee of Bharat Nidhi Ltd., Nehru Place newspaper depot, 10 July 2011.

³⁹ Interview, Narender Singh (48), Salesman of Mail Today, Statesman, Business Standard, Dainik Bhaskar and Aaj Samaj, NPND, 23 June 2011.

⁴⁰ Interview, Naresh Kumar Banwari, Salesman of outside Delhi newspapers, NPND, 2 July 2011. He trades in almost 20-30 varieties of Indian language newspaper and those which are published outside Delhi like the Gujarat Samachar (Gujarati, Ahmedabad), Anand Bazar Patrika (Bengali, Kolkata), Deccan Chronicle (English, Hyderabad), Jharkhand Chronicle (English, Ranchi), etc. He not only sells these newspapers at the NPND but also gets transports then from the Central News Agency, Connaught Place which is a wholesaler dealing in the DTB of newspapers published outside Delhi.

vendor and so on. Newspaper selling done by salesmen to the vendors only is cash. This is one of the rules of thumb in the business applicable to any and every variety of newspaper sold at the depots. Once the day's sales are over, he cross checks his amount and submits it to the newspaper Executive who then submits it at the accounts department of his company before a daily deadline⁴¹. The selling of newspapers is a very crucial task because first, it involves monetary transaction which has to be dealt with carefully. In case of default, the salesman has to pay from his pocket to balance the accounts. Another reason that makes it critical is that it is a time consuming activity which means a lot in the newspaper DTB process which itself is a race against time.

3.2.2 Newspapers Sold

What newspapers are sold at a depot depends upon the importance of the depot in terms of which area it caters to. If the depot serves an elite population which has a high literacy rate and per capita income then it is assumed that it would deal in large numbers of newspapers. They may include more English newspapers, economic newspapers and even foreign newspapers. This is also one of the reasons why newspaper circulation market in Delhi is so vast, when we consider the fact that it has one of the highest literacy and income rates in the country⁴².

Newspaper companies prioritise depots on the basis of circulation but advertisement revenues they can earn into various zones. Most circulation departments of newspaper companies in Delhi have demarcated 4-5 DTB zones in the city. These prominently are: the East, West, North, South, Central and NCR (which may include Gurgaon and Gaziabad)⁴³. However, at the ground level the formation of depots works the other way round. It is entirely the vendor's prerogative to decide the site of his depot. As Arun Sinha, Assistant General Manager and Regional Manager for South Delhi, BCCI rightly stated at the Nehru Place newspaper depot, "If tomorrow the vendors decide to do this in Chittranjan Park, we'll go there".⁴⁴

Thus the kind of newspapers that are sold at a depot depends upon the population it serves. Generally, these include the city edition, its supplements, the up-country edition brought from other places, Indian language newspapers and foreign newspapers. Two other categories that are also sold at the depots, but are not included in the diagram are – evening newspapers and magazines. They are excluded because they do not strictly conform to the supply chain of morning NNWSB. But here they will be briefly looked at.

The main newspaper sold at the depot is the city edition. It is sold along with its supplement by the salesman who charges the cover price in common for the main paper and its supplement. The cover price hence varies depending upon the day of the week because of the kind of supplements issued on that day. On weekends, the cover price is mostly high because more supplements are issued on that day. This may be applicable to other days of the week also depending upon the newspaper firm. For

⁴¹ Interview, Praveen Singh, Area Circulation Manager, HT, Nehru Place depot, 23 June 2011. He submits the daily sales amount at his office before 2:00pm each day.

⁴² Census of India 2011, Delhi's literacy rate is 86.34% and per capita income is Rs. 95,943.

⁴³ Interview, Rajesh Dutt, Sr. Manager, Results & Market Development, Bennet, Coleman & Co. Ltd (BCCL), Nehru Place Newspaper depot, 10 July 2011.

Interview, Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, New Delhi, 24 June 2011.

⁴⁴ Interview, Arun Sinha, Assistant General Manager and Regional Manager for South Delhi, BCCI, NPND, 10 July 2011.

example, the TOI has recently increased the price of its Friday newspaper from Rs. 3 to Rs 5 because of more supplements being included on that day⁴⁵.

The other category of newspapers sold is the up-country edition. These include the city editions of other cities that are demanded in Delhi, say for instance the Mumbai edition of TOI demanded in Delhi. They usually arrive a day late because of time consumed in transport and also cost marginally more. These copies are usually sold by the newspaper wholesalers in the city and come under the supervision of the up-country department of newspaper companies. For example, the up-country department of BCCL circulates TOI's Delhi edition to other cities by contacting wholesalers or agents.

The next category of newspapers circulated at a depot includes the Indian language newspapers. They usually have to be brought from outside Delhi from the up-country departments of those newspapers by the wholesalers in the city from whom the vendors purchase and sell at the depots. This supply chain is more time consuming because it involves distance. This is the reason that all the language newspapers arrive a day late and also cost more. Their costs mainly involve the airfare, road fare within the city, agent's commission, vendor's commission over and above the cover price. In other words, the cover price hardly matters in these cases. *Delivery* of these copies is done strictly on a week's advanced payment and the daily demand is very closely monitored. Some of these newspapers like the Matrabhumi (Malayalam) have increased their market in Delhi over the years and have now begun publication in Delhi itself which has considerably made the paper cheaper.

The last category of newspapers that are sold at a depot include the foreign newspapers. They are very rarely demanded because they are very costly⁴⁶ and because they give news about other places which may not be of everyone's concern. Regarding the costs and distribution they follow the same scenario as the Indian language newspapers. Another reason why newspapers sell less is because of low commission available to vendor per copy. For example, a vendor earns only 20% commission on the Tribune, London which costs Rs. 90 per copy and Dail Mail, London which costs Rs. 265 per copy to the reader in Delhi⁴⁷. Recently, the Wall Street Journal has begun publishing in Delhi which has drastically slashed its price from Rs. 80 to Rs. 25 per copy. However most of its demand is only restricted to offices and VIP areas like all other foreign newspapers⁴⁸.

Amongst the two categories that are not included in the diagram of the supply chain are the evening newspapers. Their supply chain follows the same pattern as that of morning newspapers. As they are expanding their business in the city they should need a brief mention here⁴⁹. Evening newspapers are much less popular in Delhi which confirms with the norm in our country as a whole. There are no big players in evening newspaper market, with the exception of Mid-Day which has entered Delhi only very recently. It can be largely assumed that most of these are unable to increase their business as they have

⁴⁵ Another reason to increase the cover price may be to combat black marketing in Friday's newspaper. The black marketing includes selling of fresh newspaper copies to scrap dealers. This may be more profitable for a vendor because of the heavy weight of the Friday newspaper.

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⁴⁷ Interview, Ashish Arora, newspaper and magazine vendor, NPND, 10 July 2011.

Interview, Ashish Arora, newspaper and magazine vendor, NPND, 10 July 2011.

⁴⁸ Interview, Sri Kant Pandey, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011.

⁴⁹ Mid-Day began business in Delhi from 2005 onwards. It is not published in Delhi and all its copies are imported in the city.

begun circulation in the morning hours. This could be admitted to be true as a vendor commented on Mid-Day's circulation that, "Morning main aya hai jabse badh gaya hai"⁵⁰.

Magazines and periodicals are also sold at the depots early morning on days when they are issued. These are usually Sundays in case of weeklies and fortnightlies, and first days of the month in case of monthlies. Unlike newspapers, magazines available at the NWP depots are not sold by the magazine's salesman. They are purchased from the magazine salesman or wholesaler at their place of working and then brought to the depot to be resold to other vendors who have customers ordering those particular magazines. Not all the copies of magazines are sold to the vendors. Most of them are retained for retail sales. (More on this in 4.2.6)

3.2.3 Delivery to Home

The delivery to home is performed by the vendor early morning every day. The manner in which they perform DTB varies highly from vendor-to-vendor but their role in the supply chain can be generalised.

A vendor purchases his daily demand of copies from the salesman at the depot directly in cash. They have to individually queue near the salesman to get their copies as they are supposed to sign against the entry which the salesman maintains. Once the copies are purchased the vendor unbundles them to insert supplements inside the main paper if there are any. Simultaneously, he also inserts pamphlets if only that particular day they are being sold. (More on this in 4.2.4 Pamphlets) This work is done by both the vendor and his delivery boys collectively. In case when a reader has also ordered a magazine then the vendor buys that as well from the concerned vendor on the day of their availability. Newspapers are then segregated according to the demand of the reader. For example, offices demand almost 5-10 varieties of newspapers daily. In that case their orders are separately prepared by the vendor. In the final step the distributor rubber strings the newspapers into roll, arranges them in his bicycle basket and rides for delivery.

It is also important to describe here the role of an agent. The agent as mentioned previously, purchases newspapers in wholesale from the newspaper company. These copies are normally more than 5000 per day. In case of such a large number they are unloaded directly at his area of DTB. Rest he follows the same procedure for delivery as the vendor at the depot.

⁵⁰Interview, Anonymous newspaper vendor, NPND, 10 July 2011. He informed that some of the evening newspapers have now begun to be sold in the morning hours like Mid-Day and Sandya Times (belonging to the TOI group).

4. How does it all happen?

The supply chain only describes the route which a newspaper travels each day. But it does not answer—How does it all happen? One of the best ways to answer this question is to survey the host of economic factors which constitute the chief driving factor in any market. The following subsections would study the factors influencing the vendor and the newspaper company separately.

4.1 Vendor Driven Factors

These are broadly divided into income-driven and expenditure-driven factors each of which has been described below.

A vendor's income has a variety of sources. Newspaper DTB is a highly profitable business which may earn a vendor from Rs. 5000-5,00,000 annually. The rules and regulations that govern this business are all customary practises some of which are not even established business norms. Further they are highly variable depending upon how aggressively a vendor runs his business.

INCOME	CONDITIONS
1. Daily Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • @30% commission
2. Area of Circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locality of the area • Scope of advertisement revenue
3. Promotional Offers & Gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In cash or kind
4. Pamphlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rs. 15 per 100 pamphlets of any kind
5. Weekly, Indian Language, Foreign Newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on advance payment • Transport charges included
6. Magazines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional business with additional commission
7. Service Tax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variable as per the vendor from Rs. 4-30%
8. Transfer rate of the of Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rs. 100 per reader, depends upon feasibility
9. Advanced Deposit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Agents refundable
10. Reselling to Scrap Dealers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rs. 9-12 per kg

4.1.1 Daily Newspapers

The daily newspaper on an average comprises more than 80 per cent of the total annual income of a vendor. It is because of the very nature of the commodity. Firstly, these are printed and distributed every single day of the year. This is irrespective of the market situations like economic recession which affect all other commodities. Thus DTB of daily newspapers reaps assured profits. Secondly, they are read by a large majority. This implies that they have a huge demand or readership in the market. This has proved true in the Indian scenario which has seen robust growth in newspaper market since 2005 and would continue to do so at the rate of 6.8% annually up till 2014⁵¹.

A vendor earns a commission of 30% of the cover price of each copy of a newspaper he purchases from the salesman. 30% is not a rate fixed by any higher authority like the government. Although the Audit

⁵¹ PriceWaterCoopers, *India entertainment and media outlook 2014,2010*

Bureau of Circulation (ABC) considers any copy sold above 33% commission as sold for free⁵². This rate functions like a norm for any transaction in a daily newspaper purchased by the vendor. Thus a vendor distributing 1000 copies of TOI a normal weekday costing Rs.3 each would earn Rs. 1000 for the day. Likewise his commission income increases on weekends when the same newspaper costs Rs.5.

However, the commission rate stands variable. It may increase from 30% to say 50% in case of the newly launched newspapers who offer the high commission rate as a promotional measure. For example, a newly launched paper Lok Satya pays an 'invitation discount' of 50% commission rate⁵³. This may also remain less than 30% in case of certain newspapers. For instance, before the launch of the Mint newspaper in February 2007, the commission rate offered on the ET was 25%. The ET could still continue circulation because it enjoyed monopoly amongst the economic newspapers in Delhi. But this could not comfortably continue for long and witnessed a major strike against by the vendors against the ET at the Nehru Place newspaper depot in 2003-4. The company attempted to break the strike by circulating the newspaper itself in a few places. Eventually the strike broke down after lasting for barely two days. Commission rates for ET finally rose to 30% on the midnight when the HT group declared the launch of the Mint⁵⁴. A similar strike broke out for the same reasons against the Business Standard on 8 July 2011 (Friday) when its salesman declared to pay a 25% on the day's newspaper which costs Rs. 7 each copy.⁵⁵ However like the previous strikes this too remained unsuccessful and most barely go noticed.

Out the segment of daily newspapers distributed by a vendor, it is the city edition which forms the largest share in total pie. City editions on an average would comprise more than 85% of a vendor's annual income. At the Nehru Place newspaper depot out of the total 168 vendors all of them deal in city editions of newspapers. Most popular ones include the TOI sold to all 168 vendors and HT sold to 133 daily.

The popularity of daily newspapers becomes obvious when it is noted that the demands of even part-time vendors comprises of city editions. It is worthwhile to note here that a majority of the newspaper vendors perform DTB on part-time basis. Many of them work as government employees, students and other workers. They have other commitments during the day other than newspaper DTB. Thus for them the DTB business is a considerable supplement to their incomes. Although the task is arduous, but as HL Sharma, a part-time newspaper vendor and otherwise an MTNL employee said, "*bas subah subah ka kaam hai*", it becomes a considerable source of his income. Like most part-timers he too distributes mainly city editions in few copies to nearby areas⁵⁶.

4.1.2 Area of circulation

Area of circulation is a very ambiguous concept. It refers to the area in which a vendor distributes his newspaper. For some vendors it is a bounded area where he would not allow other vendors to

⁵² Information accessed at www.auditbureau.org

⁵³ Interview, Mayank Maletha, Assistant Manager Circulation, Lok Satya, 2 July 2011.

⁵⁴ Interview, Anonymous, newspaper VDR, Nehru Place depot, 19 July 2011.

Interview, Anonymous, newspaper VDR, Nehru Place depot, 19 July 2011.

⁵⁵ Interview, Sri Kant Pandey, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011.

⁵⁶ Interview, HL Sharma, newspaper VDR and MTNL employee, Nehru Place depot, 30 June 2011. He distributes almost 200 copies of TOI and HT in the nearby NP apartments.

distribute. These are referred to as ‘closed sites’ as opposed to ‘open sites’ in their popular vocabulary. Others do not believe any such distinction.

The area in which a vendor distributes his newspapers comprises two kinds of readers: households and offices. Households are largely treated as ‘closed sites’ and offices are treated as ‘open sites’. It implies that in case of households, one particular vendor would serve newspapers and in case of offices any one can.

In case of households the vendors consider it their prerogative to distribute newspapers. This is the reason that areas like residential colonies and societies are considered as ‘fixed deposits’ by the vendors. It is because households are the main and assured customers of daily newspapers. Hence colonies are the most sought after DTB areas amongst the vendors. Vendors who acquire colony areas otherwise enjoy a higher reputation amongst the rest. If a rational newspaper vendor wishes to excel in his business then he will aim to achieve the DTB for colony areas first. The importance of colonies becomes more clear when it is treated as a ‘closed site’ property. In case where a vendor wishes to terminate DTB in a particular colony for some reason, then he can sell the area to another vendor. The price at which he would sell his area would be Rs. 1000 for each copy distributed on a particular day in the colony as the present rates. These colonies therefore remain closely guarded areas. In cases where another vendor makes an intrusion by beginning to distribute newspapers to readers in a ‘closed site’, he might have to face serious consequences. Such situations would provoke dispute between the two vendors who may even resort to violence involving mafias⁵⁷.

Some of the ‘closed sites’ served by the Nehru Place newspaper depot include Kailash colony, Kalkaji Ext Pocket 8,10,11,13,14 etc. Some of the ‘open sites’ include regions like Tughlakabad, offices in Nehru Place etc. However, the issue of ‘closed site’ concerns only those newspaper vendors who are bigger players in the DTB system. Small players unlike them try to remain aloof from such distinctions, like Vinod Kumar Sharma, with a DTB of 250 copies daily in the Tughlakabad area, said, “*apne chakkar main kisi ka nuksan nahi karna chahiye*”⁵⁸.

If one were to map the ‘open’ and ‘closed’ sites on a map of areas served by the Nehru Place newspaper depot, it would be highly unfeasible. It is because almost 60% of the vendor’s DTB area is overlapping in Delhi⁵⁹. Some vendors have a distribution in areas which are several kilometres apart from each other⁶⁰. Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, claims it is a positive fact as it does not allow one vendor to monopolize the DTB⁶¹.

Unlike the ‘closed sites’ the ‘open sites’, mainly the office areas are less controversial. For example, the Nehru Place office complex alone includes about a 1000 offices which are served by as many as nine different vendors. In case of disputes they resolve the matters either through “*apas ki understanding*”,

⁵⁷ Interview, Anonymous, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 30 June 2011. He informed about a recent case of murder that took place in the posh area of DLF Gurgaon between two newspaper vendors. The vendor who distributes in the area regularly has a huge business involving more than 14,000 copies daily. He suspected another vendor for distributing newspapers in his area. A fierce violence broke out between them leading to the latter’s murder.

⁵⁸ Interview, Vinod Kumar Sharma, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 30 June 2011.

⁵⁹ Interview, Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, New Delhi, 24 June 2011

⁶⁰ Interview, Anonymous, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 30 June 2011. He distributes newspapers in Saket, Okhla, Tughlakabad and a few other places.

⁶¹ Interview, Rajesh Sinha, Sr. Regional Manager, Mail Today, New Delhi, 24 June 2011

as Sudhir Chaudhri, President, Nehru Place Newspaper Distributor Association said, or petty violence breaks out which is easily controlled⁶².

Another aspect which influences the quality of an area, apart from it being a household or office, is certainly the literacy rate and per capita income of the readers in the area. If a vendor serves readers who have a high literacy rate and income then it can be assumed that their newspaper intake would be high. Normally readers who hold a high education qualification are English readers and read English newspapers which are slightly more expensive than other Indian language newspapers. Such readers may also have a taste for economic newspapers, interest in reading foreign newspapers or other Indian language newspapers. An increase in demand of newspapers would certainly mean increasing business for a vendor.

4.1.3 Promotional Offers & Gifts

Promotional offers and gifts constitute the incentives which vendors receive from newspaper companies. This factor is also a very important source for a vendors' income. If availability of customers gives him a reason to join the business, promotional offers and gifts give him in a reason to continue in the business.

Every newspaper company launches promotional offers periodically. They are of two kinds: one, discount offers to buy more newspapers at cheaper rates and two, based on incentives in kind for increasing the newspaper's sales.

There are a host of offers which a newspaper company launches which may offer large discounts to the vendors. For example, TOI recently launched an offer of selling one year's newspaper at Rs.444 only, ET at Rs. 299, Indian Express at Rs.999 etc. These are popularly known as 'schemes' and the copies received on that account are referred to as "*scheme ka maal*", which carries a negative connotation. (More on this in 4.1.10 Selling to Scrap Dealers) In case of newly launched newspapers the promotional offers are even higher which are known as 'invitation discount'. For example, the recently launched iDiva tabloid of TOI group offers 100 copies in Rs. 75 to the vendors, Lok Satya offers Re.1 discount on its cover price of Rs.2⁶³. These promotional offers are advertised amongst the vendors by the Salesmen and Executives. It may involve personally talking to vendors and convincing them about the advantages of the offer over a cup of tea at the nearby tea stall.

The other kind of promotional offers include incentives in kind given to the vendors. For example, a newspaper company may offer a cycle to a vendor for delivering 10 copies extra, a refrigerator, TV or AC for 100 copies extra etc. This may appear amusing almost like a barter trade, but they are very popular amongst the vendors as they are very lucrative. Cash incentives are also given along with these but they are rare. It is because the incentives in kind are more profitable for the newspaper company in comparison to the cash incentives as in the former, the company directly contacts and gets discount over the commodity demanded. These are advertised in the same way as the other promotional offers. At times, the executives also spend time amongst the vendors to know their demands which they wish the company to fulfil.

Apart from these, a newspaper company may also send gifts to the vendors on their marriage anniversaries, birthdays, festivals and other occasions. These may include crockery sets, small electronic

⁶² Interview, Sudhir Chaudhari, President Nehru Place Newspaper Distributor Association, Nehru Place depot, 8 July 2011.

⁶³ Interview, Mayank Maletha, Assistant Manager Circulation, Lok Satya, 2 July 2011.

equipment etc. with the newspaper company brand name mentioned on the hamper. Thus if one gets to visit the house of one of these vendors, one could find gifts given by different newspaper companies.

4.1.4 Pamphlets

Pamphlets are only an additional source of income for the vendors. They are sold by the concerned person or at times by a company's salesman, which wishes to advertise itself at the depots. The rates of these pamphlets are variable in different depots. This is because of the advertising potential of a depot. For example it varies from Rs. 15 per 100 pamphlets at Nehru Place and Rs. 10 per 100 pamphlets at Connaught Place. However this rate is the same for all of kinds of pamphlets which may vary from one on gloss papers to others on cheaper quality black-n-white ones.

Similar to pamphlets sometimes, stickers and small replicas of a product are pasted on top of the newspaper for advertisement. The only concern of the newspaper company here is that the newspaper content should not become unreadable.

However, not all vendors choose to earn from pamphlets regularly. It is because they have to be manually inserted within the newspapers which is time consuming. In case of vendors who distribute large number of copies, this time consuming affair may prove costly at the end. Usually it is young delivery boys who take interest in earning from pamphlets. It is an important source of earning for them as most of them are part-time delivery boys. They are normally allowed to directly pocket their income from pamphlets by the vendor for whom they work. Manoj Bisht, one such distributor, also a class X student at the Govt. Boys Senior Secondary School rightly claims "*humara kya jar aha hai*", while inserting the "*ishtehaar*" in the newspapers. He earns as much as his monthly salary which is Rs. 800 per month from inserting pamphlets which earns him around Rs. 750 a month⁶⁴.

4.1.5 Weekly, Indian Language and Foreign Newspapers

Other than city editions of the daily newspapers all others including the weekly, Indian language and foreign newspapers are minor sources of income for the vendors. It is because of three reasons: one, they provide less commission; two, they involve greater risks; and three, they are less in demand.

Weekly newspapers like the Employment News, which is a government publication circulated on Sundays, offers a commission of as little as 18.75%. This turns to a commission of Rs. 1.50 on its cover price which is Rs. 8. Indian language and foreign newspapers, too provide low commission rate that may not exceed more than 25%. (See section 3.2.2 Newspapers Sold). Thus in case of these newspapers the vendors may charge a rupee extra over their commission, which they implement as 'service tax' for their delivery. (More on this in section 4.1.7 Service tax)

Some of these newspapers become risky to deal in when mistakenly an extra copy of the newspaper remains with the vendor undistributed. This usually happens in cases where the reader terminates his demand for the particular paper for a very short duration, say a day or two. Normally in such situations with the city edition newspapers, the vendor returns the extra copy to the respective salesman on the next day who then replaces it for a fresh copy. But in case of say the Employment News, the paper is

⁶⁴ Interview, Manoj Bisht, distributor, NPND, 2 July 2011. He delivers newspapers in the Kalkaji C-Block area along with his brother Mukesh since past 6-7 years. They mainly distribute TOI, HT, NBT which are most popular newspapers which part-timers like them often trade in.

non-returnable. Similarly foreign newspapers may cause a big loss even if they may be one or two copies extra. It is because each newspaper costs almost Rs. 100 per copy on an average and remains non-returnable if so few of these are left. This is the reason that the business in these newspapers is done absolutely on advanced payment basis and their demand closely monitored every day. (More on this in section 4.1.14 Left over newspapers)

Lastly, these newspapers do not comprise a considerable sum of a vendor's income because they are clearly less in demand. Only those newspaper vendors who cater to a large readership area can be seen involved in the DTB of these newspapers. Small vendors, on the other hand serve a small area where the demand of such newspapers is usually rare, unless the area comprises of a distinct cultural locality. For example, even small vendors serving in the CR Park area may distribute the popular Anand Barazar Patrika (Bengali) in considerable numbers.

However, vendors income from foreign newspapers "*barely exceeds 1%*" and in case of Indian language newspapers comprises "*not more than 20%*" of their annual turnover, as Mrs. Neeta Puri, owner of the Central News Agency revealed⁶⁵. This becomes more significant when it is noted that the Central News Agency is almost a monopolist in the trading of these newspapers in New Delhi having barely any competitors. For a big vendor like Sri Kant Pandey, newspaper vendor at Nehru Place depot, these newspapers are like "*dukaan ka mail*" which are sold to maintain a reader by offering him more variety. He proposed that he would even gladly sell a copy of the Employment News for free to a customer just to maintain his order and have a good relationship⁶⁶. For small vendors, it is indeed a source of additional income like an anonymous who said "*Do paise milta bhi hai to kya jaata hai*".

4.1.6 Magazines

Apart from the non-daily newspapers magazines are the other sources of secondary income for the vendors. They remain secondary for similar reasons like: low commission, low demand and greater risk.

Magazines are purchased by vendors from salesmen at MGZ depots like the one at Bangla Sahib in Delhi. These are then resold to other vendors at the newspaper depots and left for retail sale. They generally offer a commission of 20-25% on their cover price. Their commission rate is not fixed. It varies from every MGZ whether it is local, national or international. For example, a popular Hindi monthly, the Grihashobha earns a commission of Rs.6 on its cover price of Rs. 30. Time and The Economist offer 20% and 25% commission respectively.

When it is taken into account that magazines are only weekly, fortnightly or monthly their income appears substantially low. This is the reason that most MGZ business confines to retail stores. Vendors distribute magazines only if they find it feasible.

An interesting trade involving the magazines is the renting of old ones to readers on a monthly basis. Few vendors perform this activity. They offer up to five varieties of magazines of the immediate previous edition to the readers. They remain with the reader each for a week which is then replaced by another MGZ for the next week. These are charged on monthly basis not exceeding Rs. 100⁶⁷.

⁶⁵ Interview, Mrs Neeta Puri, owner of the Central News Agency, New Delhi, 12 July 2011.

⁶⁶ Interview, Sri Kant Pandey, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011. He owns the Diwedi newspaper Agency distributes more than a 1000 copies daily in Kalkaji and NP area.

⁶⁷ Interview, Mahendra Kumar Bansal, newspaper VDR who runs Bansal newspaper Agency, NPND, 2 July 2011.

4.1.7 Service Tax

This refers to the extra rates a vendor charges over the reader's monthly bill. They refer to it as service taxes which vary from Rs. 4 to as much as Rs. 30 per newspaper per month⁶⁸. Ideally, vendors cannot charge any extra delivery charges. They are paid the commission by the newspaper company for complete door-to-door delivery. Vendors often deny charging service tax saying, "*hamein nai pata*", as Sanjay Singh Rawat, vendor and Vice-President Nehru Place Newspaper Distributor Association said⁶⁹. Nevertheless, it remains a popular and accepted practise as long as the vendor is not cross-checked by the reader.

4.1.8 Transfer rate of the Reader

'Transfer rate' refers to an amount which a vendor charges from another vendor when he shifts service to a reader falling within his area to one who falls within the area of another vendor. The amount charged is Rs. 100 and is very occasionally done. This is because firstly, such instances are rare, and secondly, vendors do not always come to know if the case exists. Further it cannot be charged when a vendor shifts service to a reader far away.

Transfer rates give a very peculiar example of the customary laws which govern the business of newspaper vendors⁷⁰.

4.1.9 Advanced Deposit

When a vendor wishes to upgrade himself to an agent, he has to pay an advanced deposit as security to the salesman of the particular newspaper company as per the newspaper company norms. For example, a vendor needs to submit a two month advanced deposit for 20 days with the TOI salesman if he wishes to become a TOI group agent. This amount is reimbursed to the vendor after the expiry of the period⁷¹. The benefit of being an agent is direct unloading of newspapers at the site of VDS choice. This may prove profitable in the long term. However becoming an agent is not popular amongst the vendors. Less than 1% of the total circulation of TOI newspapers at the Nehru Place newspaper depot is done by agents who are only eight in total.⁷²

4.1.10 Reselling to Scrap Dealers

Resale of fresh newspapers to scarp dealers is a legal offence and there is a large black market that exists in this business. Vendors profit from this black market in two cases: one, when they have extra

⁶⁸ Interview, Mahendra Kumar Bansal, newspaper VDR who runs Bansal newspaper Agency, NPND, 2 July 2011.

⁶⁹ Interview, Sanjay Singh Rawat, Vice- President Nehru Place Newspaper Distributor Association, Nehru Place depot, 17 July 2011.

⁷⁰ Interview, Ramji Pandey, newspaper vendor, Nehru Place depot, 10 July 2011.

⁷¹ Interview, Rajesh Kalra, Salesman of TOI & ET and employee of Bharat Nidhi Ltd., NPND, 10 July 2011.

⁷² Interview, Rajesh Dutt, Sr. Manager, Results & Market Development, Bennet, Coleman & Co. Ltd (BCCL), Nehru Place Newspaper depot, 17 July 2011.

copies that they can afford to sell scrap dealers without their DTB loss; and two, when the weight of a newspaper may earn more than the rate of commission at which they are purchased.

EXPENDITURE	CONDITIONS
1. Salary of delivery boys	• Varies from Rs.500-1000 per month
2. Transport charges	• Cycles have to be provided by the vendor*
3. Rubber	• Risen in recent years
5. Left over newspapers	• Only limited return to the salesman

4.1.11 Salary of Delivery boys

This is a very marginal amount which a vendor may have to incur out of his total income. The salary of a distributor varies from Rs. 500-850 normally. Also, if a vendor performs delivery himself or the delivery is done by a family member then this expenditure is not applicable. This remains a case with a majority of the vendors who are small players.

4.1.12 Transport charges

This refers to the transport cost incurred by a vendor for daily delivery of newspapers. Perhaps this is the reason that all the vendors who use bicycles for delivery have zero fuel consumption. It is not out of poverty but out of economic rationality that cycles go along with the newspaper *wala*.

4.1.13 Rubber

Cost of a rubber packet containing 200 strings has risen multiple times over recent years and stands at Rs. 300 per pack presently.

4.1.14 Left over Newspapers

These are the newspapers which are left extra with a vendor after delivery. This may happen due to extra purchase by mistake. They become a loss when there are too many as they cannot be returned to the salesman who replaces the number of copies with fresh ones the next day.

4.2 Newspaper company driven factors

Circulation earns barely 10-15% of revenue for the company. Rather it involves more expenditure than income. This is major challenge that the print media faces and overcomes it through advertisement revenue.

5. Conclusion

This paper hence finds answer to the question it had raised – “Do you how a newspaper reaches you?” In course of its unfolding it attempts to show how this simple question has such complicated answers to make.

6. Photo Gallery

(The following photos were clicked during the field visits made to the Nehru Place Newspaper depot between 23 Jun-17 Jul 2011, 4:00-7:30am.)



Figure 1. Arrival of Newspapers in wagons from the TOI printing press at Shahibabad to the Nehru Place Newspaper depot at 4:00am



Figure 2. Labour unloading TOI newspaper bundles from the wagon to the depot



Figure 3. Vendors claiming their TOI & ET copies once their stacks are unloaded at the depot



Figure 4. TOI Salesman overlooks the stack TOI, ET and NBT bundles. These are wrapped in plastic sheets because as the Salesman answered, "humari company thoda professional kaam karti hai".



Figure 5. Vendors queue to buy their daily demand of TOI, ET and NBT from the TOI Salesmen



Figure 6. Bundles of HT, Hindustan and Mint stacked together. Almost 27,000 copies of HT arrive at Nehru Place depot each day.



Figure 7. HT Salesman collect cash payment from a vendor.



Figure 8. Vendor carrying copies of HT main paper and HT City for sorting



Figure 8. Vendor counting copies after purchase



Figure 9. Vendors squatting on a pavement side for sorting copies as per distribution areas and inserting pamphlets



Figure 10. Vendor prepares copies for delivery by making newspaper rolls



Figure 11. Vendor segregating copies of almost 30-40 varieties of newspapers for each delivery boy to be delivered in different areas.



Figure 12. Copies mounted and vendor off to delivery

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