

Gallup Pakistan History Project - **Weekend Read 19** ‘**Changing media landscape: Radio and Newspapers in Pakistan**’: by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project)

Mass media have experienced significant technological and qualitative transformations over the last century. Each shift towards a new paradigm for communicating and networking has unleashed substantial societal effects around the world. In “*Amusing Ourselves to Death*”, Neil Postman conducts a brilliant analysis of the history of media ecology by identifying the powerful and deeply consequential impacts that technological changes in media have imprinted on social structures, institutions, and interpersonal relations. Each shift in media structures and their consumption has been characterized by processes of disruption and recreation in society. For example, the invention of radio disrupted the prevalence of the printed word-based informational exchange as the primary medium of communication in societies. Similarly, the invention of television further subverted the flow of communication and information by making viewers passive recipients and listeners of information and news, rather than active speakers and participants. In our contemporary world, new media technologies have further altered the paradigmatic impact of old media on communication networks by democratizing, diversifying and devolving the origins and flows of news and information.

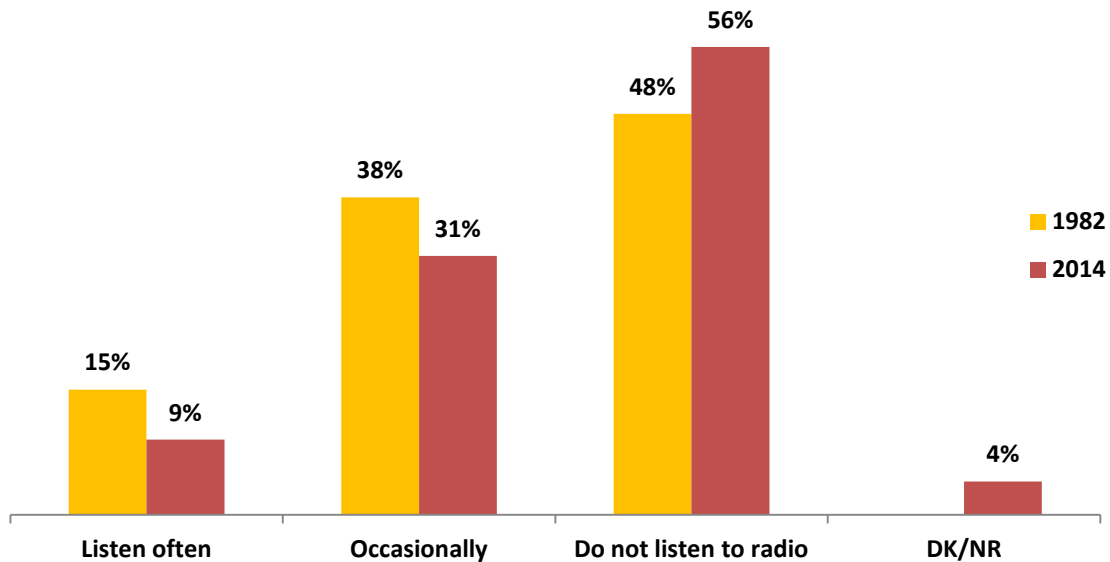
In Pakistan, media have undergone substantial transformations since 1947. With the increasing penetration of communication technologies, Pakistanis have been treated to various shifts in mass media services. Technological changes have worked alongside institutional and regulatory variables to alter the ways in which people in Pakistan consume and disseminate news and information, as well as conduct discourses and conversations in the public sphere. Radio and newspapers were the dominant media for communicating and informing in Pakistan in the early years after independence. With the establishment of the state-controlled television (PTV) in the early 1960s, Pakistanis entered the age of television – a medium criticized for its trivialization of ideas and information by Postman, especially when under state control. The Pakistani media landscape remained inhabited by state television, print media, and radio for the next four decades. In the early 2000s, the television industry was de-regulated and private electronic media operators were allowed to enter the thinly populated terrain of Pakistani media. Many analysts and commentators have provided excellent deconstruction of the effects of this more recent shift on the infrastructure of social communication in Pakistan, and more crucially, the impact on the quality and content of ideas and discourses circulating the public sphere. More recently, new media platforms have been delivered to Pakistanis through increased access to internet; albeit, this access remains limited in Pakistan. Amidst these transformations over the last seven decades, how have Pakistanis’ media consumption habits changed? What impact has the changing technological structures in the media landscape had on other technologies?

The answers to these aforementioned queries are found in the repository of historical public opinion data kept by Gallup Pakistan. The organization has worked diligently to build and secure profiles of Pakistan’s changing societal shades since the early 1980s. In the impressive range of data available on different subjects, Gallup Pakistan has also recorded data on Pakistanis’ media habits, and their preferences for media consumption over the last three

decades. This week’s discussion benefits from this data by focusing on the impact of changing media consumption patterns on the two *original* media in Pakistan’s communication landscape: radio and newspapers.

How has Pakistanis’ usage of radio changed in the last three decades? Gallup Pakistan asked Pakistanis the following question first in 1982, and then tracked it again in 2014 more recently: Do you usually listen to radio? The results on this query are shown in the figure below:

### Radio Listenership in Pakistan



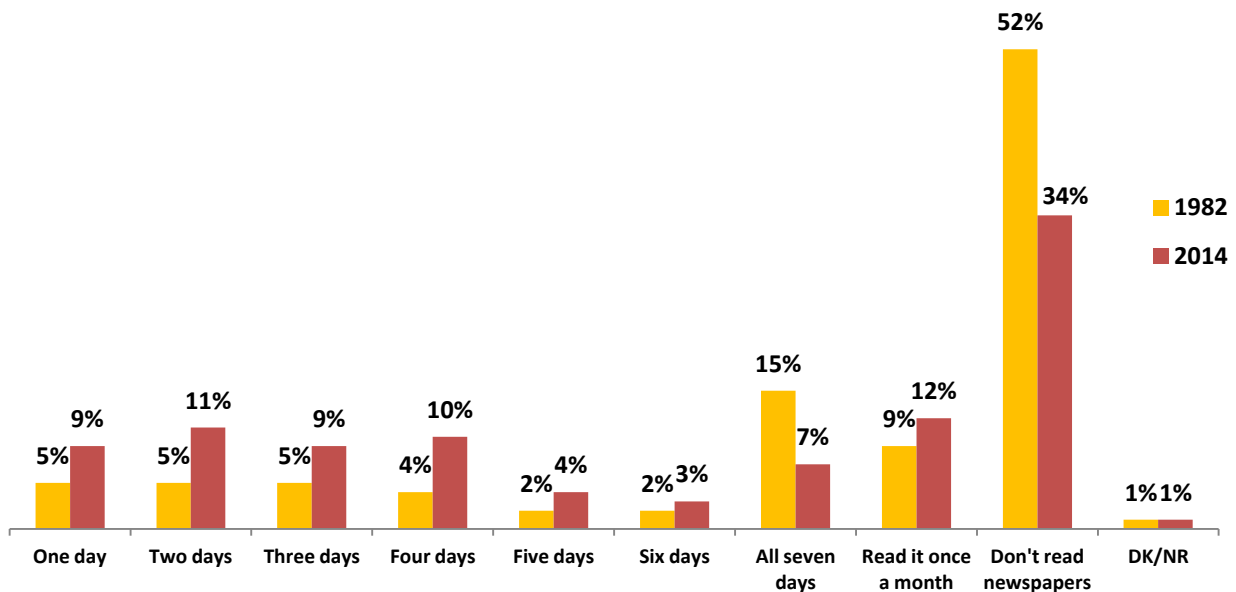
The results seen here provide empirical foundations for what has been generally understood at the theoretical and professional level. First, the advent of television, and then of new media technologies has over time, actively eroded radio listenership in Pakistan. In 1982, a total of 53% Pakistanis listened to radio either regularly or occasionally. In 2014, the highest proportion of Pakistanis, 56% reports that they do not listen to radio.

Evidence here is clearly indicative of the downward trend in radio listenership in Pakistan. The advent of television, alongside competition from print media as a source of news and information has restricted the space for radio to become a dominant format for communication in the country. Evidence here shows that radio was a significant format for the flow of news, information and communication in the early 1980s. Socioeconomic evidence from the early 1980s shows that television access was certainly restricted, given that the cost of owning a television was prohibitive for Pakistanis; and, television broadcast services were not widely available throughout the country. Similarly, newspaper circulation was limited across the country. Radio offered a cheaper alternative for media consumption (for most Pakistanis) – with one radio device often serving several households in a single neighborhood/community. In this relatively relaxed media ecology, radio was the most important source of news, information and entertainment for Pakistanis nearly three decades ago. However, this environment has changed substantially since that time. Today, radio has receded in terms of

significance as the most important medium for news and information in Pakistan. 40% Pakistanis report that they listen to radio in 2014, but the intensity and quality of this listenership in on the decline in Pakistan.

The impact of the changing media landscape on newspaper readership in Pakistan has been varying analyzed and interpreted. Gallup Pakistan asked Pakistanis to report the frequency with which they had read a newspaper in the recent past. Specifically, the following question was asked to a representative sample of Pakistanis, first in 1982, and then again in 2014: Approximate how many days last week did you read the newspaper? Findings from this longitudinal comparison are shown in the figure below:

### Newspaper Readership in Pakistan



The results recorded by Gallup Pakistan show an interesting picture of the changing pattern of newspaper readership in Pakistan. Over the last decade or so, the newspaper industry in Pakistan has been over-shadowed by the phenomenal growth in television viewing. This change has been associated with declining newspaper readership. However, the data here show that the newspaper industry’s performance (as measured in terms of increased readership) has increased over the last three decades. In 1982, the highest proportion of Pakistanis (52%) reported that they did not read any newspaper, while 15% reported that they read a newspaper all seven days. In 2014, the proportion of those that do not read a newspaper has declined significantly to 34%. This decline has transferred into increased readership frequency over an average week. Compared with the early 1980s, more Pakistanis read newspapers in 2014.

Two important observations must be made about this finding. First, the commonly-held belief of downward trend in newspaper readership (often times substantiated by industry

professionals) is based on comparisons after the 1980s. This implies that if newspaper readership has indeed declined in Pakistan, data from the 1990s and early 2000s might be helpful in charting the peaks and troughs during the last three decades. Second, while data here shows that there is increased newspaper readership in Pakistan in 2014, this readership is more erratic. Most Pakistanis read newspapers with varying degrees of frequency and intensity. Crucially, the cohort of Pakistanis who are dedicated newspaper readers i.e. read newspapers all through an average week has declined. This implies that for the newspaper industry, while readership might have expanded overall, the frequency of this readership has changed significantly.

For the newspaper industry in Pakistan, several changes have been tracked and recorded in the last few decades. The number of publications in Pakistan has shot up enormously over the last three decades – with large metropolitan cities alone housing hundreds of publications (of varying sizes). Similarly, the increased newspaper readership in Pakistan could also be explained by increasing literacy rates in the country over the last three decades. With increased educational and economic resources, more Pakistanis can now access (afford) and read newspapers. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that newspapers are often read communally in Pakistan i.e. newspapers are shared in public spaces. For example, small retail stores and road-side restaurants often have newspapers that are browsed by customers and patrons. This form of readership has a critical implication for the newspaper industry. While the readership penetration might be greater in Pakistan today than it was three decades ago, this does not translate into readership-based revenues and profits for the newspaper industry. Revenues for the newspaper industry are instead driven by and through advertisements, under the assumption of widespread readership across the country.

Radio and newspaper are the progenitors of the media industry in Pakistan. Their evolution over the last seven decades has transformed from a position of dominance to decline (for radio) and increased competition (for newspapers). In this modern and changing media environment, both mediums have to make critical choices in order to survive and evolve. Evidence from across the world suggests that these two industries have finally begun innovating by transferring their mode of transmission and engagement. Specifically, the newspaper and radio industries have increasingly migrated towards and ensconced themselves in the infrastructure offered by the internet and new media technologies. Today, most newspapers and radio channels use online delivery mechanisms to reach their intended audiences. For newspapers and radio industries in Pakistan, this path offers one viable alternative for continued relevance, penetration, and growth.