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## Challenges to Preserve Indigenous Newspapers: A Case of Developing Country

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### Abstract:

*Newspapers have been used in research as a primary source for recording and depicting the earlier times histories and cultures. The present study aims to highlight the local preservation practices undertaken by the two oldest libraries of Pakistan. It further identifies the various challenges and issues of binding conservation, storage, pest control and temperature maintenance. Data were collected through interview and observation from a public and an academic library with rich and rare collection of newspapers.*

*The study highlights the need to assure the longevity of current and historic newsprints for future generation by adopting adequate preservation methods. The findings may be applicable for other developing countries with same context.*

**Keywords:** Newspapers, Preservation, Pakistan, Preservation of newspapers in developing countries, challenges of preserving newsprints

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### Introduction

The role of newspapers is well established in informing current and retrospective happenings in the world of politics, economics, technology, education, health and entertainment. Newspapers have been used in research as a primary source for recording and depicting the earlier times histories and cultures. Onu (2005) observed that newspapers were important part of a library collection as their usage rate in Nigerian academic libraries was high to meet the research, educational, recreational, sports, and cultural needs of users. During recent years, though many advanced countries have moved to digital news media, in other areas of the developing world, newspapers in print format have continued to grow in number and circulation. Libraries in developing countries put special attention to enhance the life of printed

newspapers by adopting preserving strategies such as acquiring extra copies or making duplicates, getting them into hard bindings, managing temperature and controlling pests. The slow fires raised the idea of transforming them into more durable formats such as microfilm, microfiche and more recently into digital form to ensure their prolonged life.

In Pakistan, despite popularity of digital news media, indigenous newspapers in print format are still popular. Mostly libraries acquire newspapers in print format as the print versions contain more elaborative coverage and critical discussions of issues.

Punjab University Library (1882) and Punjab Public Library (1884), situated in Lahore are the oldest and the largest resource centers of knowledge and information in academic and public domain. Both libraries subscribed local newspapers in Urdu and English. Punjab University Library (PUL) subscribes eighteen newspapers (10 in English and eight in Urdu) including two international newspapers, Khaleej Times and Financial Times. Twelve newspapers are received in Punjab Public Library (PPL) daily.

By way of organization and access provision, PPL makes a manual index of newspapers while PUL has recently shifted to electronic version. However, storage and preservation have become gigantic tasks for both libraries due to the huge number of newspapers acquired over a long period. For example, PUL is maintaining files of different national newspapers especially Nawa-i-Waqt and Pakistan Times from 1954 to date. Generally, newspapers are published daily, amounting to 365 issues in a year. Since, both libraries acquire 18 and 12 titles daily, adequate space, storage facilities and preservation over a period of time has become a cumbersome task. Furthermore, print newspapers are susceptible to quick deterioration because of the brittle paper with which they are made. Exposure to light, air and high humidity breaks it down quickly due to high level of acidity. Both the libraries have been practicing the binding method for storing and preserving newspapers along with precautions including proper handling of newspapers, protecting from light, air and humidity, avoiding excessive use and storing newspapers in dry, dark and cool area, free from insects, but this method has proved inadequate in literature because of huge volume and brittle paper of newspapers (Ugah, 2009).

This article describes current newspaper preservation practices and their success level in the both libraries of Pakistan. It further discusses the practical strategies to ensure the longevity of print news media. This article will contribute to the literature by portraying the challenges of preservation practices of libraries from a developing country's perspective.

## **Literature Review**

Literature reported multiple preservation dilemmas of newspapers due to low quality papers which become brittle when exposed to light and high humidity. Various preservation strategies and storage practices from traditional binding method to digital conversion have been also discussed in this regard (Hasenay & Krtalić, 2010; Knapp, Gearhart, Kellerman & Klimczyk, 2018; Presnell & Morris, 2017).

Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Osinulu (2015) advocated the need to preserve newspapers in Nigerian academic libraries after establishing their significance in research, education, and economic development. The authors reviewed the binding method of preservation practiced in libraries and found it inadequate. They advocated for digitization model to ensure the longevity of the valuable historical documents. They further identified the social, financial and

technological challenges of digitization such as poor technological infrastructure, insufficient funding, digital divide, lack of expertise, and copyright prohibitions. Njeze (2012) also emphasized on strategic planning for long term preservation of print and non-print materials including newspapers and significant historical documents of Nigerian universities. Previously, Ugah (2009) discussed similar type of strategies for preservation and increased access to Nigerian newspapers through appropriate planning for microfilming, digitization, abstracting and indexing and creation of newspapers database through skilled manpower. Hasenay and Krtalić (2010) explained newspaper preservation by mentioning some real-world examples of good practices in the field. They also discussed approaches to preservation of Croatian newspapers and outline major developments in this regard.

In United States of America (USA), libraries and historical societies acquire newspapers from across the globe, preserve them carefully in controlled environment and transform them to microfilm or electronic images. Since early 1980s, the Library of Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities have been working together on the “United States Newspapers Program” which locates, catalogs and preserves newspapers published throughout the country. However, Simon (2015) talked about the recent changing models of access due to digital news media, combined with the challenges and cost of acquiring and storing print newspapers from overseas which resulted in drastic reductions in the amount of print newspapers currently collected in the USA and Canada for research purposes. Though, Silverman (2014) advocated for the preservation of hard copies of newspapers even in the digital age. In USA, retaining original printed copies of newspapers as backup files after scanning (digitization) was not a priority. He undermined the widely held US misperceptions that once digitized, print copy of newspapers become superfluous. Keeping in view the complicated nature of the newspapers, he emphasized the importance of retaining hardcopy primary source material in perpetuity. He recommended that use of custom designed polyester folders, coroplast boxes, and environmentally controlled storage conditions to preserve hard copies of newspapers.

A recent paper written by Presnell & Morris (2017) discussed three themes of discoverability, access, and preservation in academic libraries of the United States. They particularly talked about the current and future preservation challenges of multiple formats (i.e. print, microfilm, scanned full-page images, and born electronic newspapers). They opined that academic librarians were lagging behind to explore, anticipate, or solve problems related to the longevity of all these formats. Special concerns were noted regarding digitized or born digital format housed on servers, more susceptible to quick disappearance or made inaccessible. They concluded that librarians must continue to be concerned with the preservation of all these formats.

In local literature, the authors hardly found any study on the topic. So this study will fill the gap in this regard.

## **Research questions**

To meet the objectives of the study following research questions were formed:

RQ1. What is the perception of LIS professionals about preserving original hard copy of newspaper?

RQ2. What types of preservation activities do libraries currently use to save newspapers as ‘content’ and as a ‘material’?

RQ3. What are the challenges libraries faced to preserve ephemeral newspapers in tropical weather?

RQ4. What kind of preservation practices is suggested to preserve newsprints in Pakistani libraries?

## **Research Method**

To achieve the objective of the study, one academic and one public library with the large collection of current and rare newspapers from Pakistan were selected. These libraries have been selected due to their historical significance being oldest libraries while acquiring and preserving a number of indigenous newspapers. Furthermore, the libraries also housed some rare and historically significant newspapers of the sub-continent region named “*Paisa*” (1892-1932), “*Zemindar*” and “*Amroz*” (1947-2016) in Urdu language covering colonial and post-colonial period. There is dearth of literature on newspaper preservation in Pakistani context. So the current study designed to investigate the phenomenon based on the qualitative research design. Document analysis, personal visits, personal experience of the principal author and interviews with LIS professionals working in these two libraries, are used to collect data. Relevant literature on the topic was reviewed to articulate the research questions and context of the study. LIS professionals (N=3) working in the newspaper sections of both libraries were interviewed along with the observations/experiences of one of the author who worked there for six years. The time of the interviews ranged from 25-40 minutes. By using content analysis, this textual interview data is presented in a descriptive manner. Hence, the data is elucidating LIS professionals’ perception about newspapers preservation as ‘content’ and as a ‘material’ along with challenges to preserve them.

The small amount of data is a potential limitation of the current study and the results indicate the opinion of LIS professionals about the challenges to preserve indigenous newspapers in two libraries. These findings may not generalize. Nevertheless, this is a base line study and explored an important research area that would be helpful for future research.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This section describes the findings and discussion according to the research questions:

RQ1. What is the perception of LIS professionals about preserving original hard copy of newspaper?

In this study preservation refers to the measure for ensuring the longevity of newsprints. Respondents discussed the two ways of preservation; ‘newspaper originals as a material’ and ‘newspapers information/content’.

Preservation of newspaper originals e.g. newsprint, means to save original format/material on which newspapers are printed. Newspaper originals mainly emphasize to preserve paper as a material and its physical integrity. One respondent mentioned, “the process of aging in newsprints can’t be stopped; it can only be decelerated”. Respondents opined that they might slow the aging process of newsprints through proper handling and careful use of the material. Overall, in aging process material eludes its physical attributes of papers and tenacity.

On the other hand, preserving newspaper information “refers to the value of newspapers that primarily lies in the information they contain”. It is noted that these two concepts are not mutually exclusive rather supportive to each other for enduring preservation. The respondents believed that it is the moral duty of the librarians to preserve the irreplaceable newspaper collection as it holds intellectual and cultural legacy to be transferred to the present and future generations.

Respondents perceived that information professionals should understand the types and causes of newspapers damages. Another statement was, “Any librarian responsible for the preservation of printed newspapers should know the various causes of newspapers deterioration and the possible methods for their preservation”. Various biological and chemical factors including low quality paper, excessive use, exposure to light, heat and dust were the main causes mentioned by the respondents.

RQ2. What types of preservation activities/practices do libraries currently used to save newspapers as ‘content’ and as a ‘material’?

Respondents described different preservation practices to save newspapers as ‘content’ and as a ‘material’. Pakistani libraries usually use 'binding preservation' method for newspapers though that is not recommended for long time preservation in literature. However, 'binding preservation' is still traditional common practice for newspapers preservation. Both libraries in this study bought/got two copies of each newspapers; one for users day-to-day needs and other for preservation purpose and get them bind after couple of months. These bind newsprints are used for future reference and research with great care. Only researchers are allowed to consult these rare bind newspaper collections. It is worth mentioning that '*binding preservation*' is being used in both libraries for almost one and half century. Binding is basically used due to its simple procedure and low cost. Though it have certain issues related to the handling of large page format, heavy volumes of newsprints and chances of text mutilation due to frequent use. However, respondent pondered on the factors of its comparative success in these libraries. First and the most important identified factor is preventive measures. They admitted that aging process couldn't be stopped in preserving the newspaper originals due to the quality of paper and other biological and chemical factors. However, libraries may adopt a number of measures to slow down the process of aging and to enhance the useable life for a longer period. The interviewees mention careful shelving, proper handling, maintaining temperature and controlling pests as measures to bung the aging process. Both libraries shelved newspapers bindings horizontally while arranging them chronologically. This type of shelving arrangement facilitates users to access required paper with less handling effort. It was observed that each binding has its bibliographic information on the spine that serve as surrogate to find information easily. Nevertheless, a separate document listing all bindings is available for users.

Moreover, these libraries are focused to maintain microclimate despite the extreme weather of the region. The temperature of the city ranged from -1°C to 48 to °C (118 °F) in winter and summer season respectively. Libraries have been maintaining the 20–25°C temperature through air conditioning system and relative humidity of 55% to preserve the newspaper bindings. It is not possible to maintain temperature and humidity around the clock. So it is beneficial to use humidifiers in dry climate to have needed moisture level. Dehumidifiers are used to remove moisture in wet/rainy/monsoon season from July to August. Microfilms of rare newspapers are available; still these libraries are more concerned about the preservation of newsprints due to their historical nature, irreparable legacy and most importantly lack of technology plan for their preservation.

Respondents identified certain cautions to save newspapers from human also. These preventive measures include keeping food and drink away, non-use of paper clips and rubber band. Other preservation strategies such as supportive protective enclosures, flat storage, microfilming of clippings are also used to enhance longevity of newsprints. The respondents strongly believed in preventive preservation and perhaps such measures involve less effort and cost on the part of libraries to keep the ephemeral newspapers useable, and functional.

The proper management and handling of newsprints from humidity, dust, light and extreme temperature are the common preventive measures use by the libraries across the world. Preventive preservation approach is cost-effective as compare to repairing the damage clippings or converting them to other formats i.e. microfilm, microfiche and digital image etc. One library initiated the digitization of newspapers and the other is still in planning stage.

Azadirachta indica (Neem) is the common, economical and versatile medicinal plant in the sub-continent having a wide spectrum of biological activity. Neem leaves is also used as traditional precautionary measure to treat creepy-crawlies in the region. Findings indicate that libraries in Pakistan use Neem leaves as a natural treatment to protect printed material from bugs. The leaves are kept in the bindings and pages of newspapers to repel insects and pests. Neem trees are also planted around the library buildings to keep the insects away, to make environment pleasant and to reduce weather severity.

RQ3. What are the challenges libraries face to preserve ephemeral newspapers in tropical weather?

The respondents identified following challenges to preserve the ephemeral newspapers in libraries with limited sources:

- Pakistani libraries usually use '*binding preservation*' method that is still traditional common practice for newspapers. Though newspaper bindings is a challenge for long time preservation.
- Libraries, somehow manage temperature of 20–25° during working hours but in off time it is difficult to maintain. Furthermore, this challenge aggravates in times of energy crises in the country. Libraries have to use alternate energy sources to tackle the load shedding of electricity.
- Lack of planning in preservation activities is also a challenge for libraries to achieve the objective of prolonged life of the ephemeral newsprints
- Besides preserving newsprints for future generation and to assure the longevity of their hardcopies, there is a dire need to have well-designed technology plan for digitization.
- Inadequate budget
- Lack of staff training to preserve rare newsprint.
- Higher authorities allocate budget only in the case of damage to rare collection instead of preventive preservation. This can be avoided by considering the convolution of preservation of damaged newsprints.
- Good housekeeping and maintenance of optimum storage condition for brittle newsprints is a challenge for libraries and professionals in local perspective.

RQ4. What are the suggested ways to preserve newsprints in Pakistani libraries?

The following suggestions are made to meet the challenges for preserving ephemeral newspapers in tropical weather of Pakistan, in particular, and libraries of other developing countries, in general.

- Newsprint should be used only for research purpose otherwise digital copies should be provided
- Green practices should be followed in libraries including green windowpanes to block ultraviolet rays.
- Edibles inside the library should not be allowed
- It is noted that dry Neem leaves and its seed powder is a good precautionary measure to prevent insects. It is safe to keep dry leaves in the bindings as it acts both as an insect repellent and insecticide.
- Newsprints ought be kept in neutral boxes of adjustable size
- A firm alkaline permanent quality paper should inserted between newspaper sheets and avoid licking of fingers to turn pages.
- Paper should be stored in the area where direct sunlight is prevented to avoid its ultraviolet rays
- All the biological and chemical causes that would accelerate newspaper deterioration must be avoided
- Digitization of newspapers should be properly planned out.

## **Conclusion**

Findings show that newspapers deteriorate due to harsh dry and hot weather, dust, poor temperature maintenance, high humidity level, and exposure to direct light. In local perspective, the practice of using Neem as traditional precautionary measure to treat creepy-crawlies may be useful for other libraries in the region. An old proverb, “prevention is better than cure” proves true in the case of newsprint preservation. Especially preventive preservation is significant to keep the ephemeral newspapers useable, and functional. Though this study has the limitations of exploring only two libraries purposively selected. It is expected that the findings may be applicable for other developing countries with same context. It will raise awareness among librarians about the various challenges and issues to preserve rare indigenous newspapers along with the local preservation practices. It will also assist as a parameter to promote research in this unexplored area.

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