

New study sheds light on media habits in Myanmar

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A new study “*Myanmar’s media from an audience perspective*” provides insights into people’s media habits and understanding of news and information. The study conducted by IMS-Fojo, finds that people prefer local media and news on topics that relates to their everyday lives and challenges. While TV remains the most popular news medium, social media, and Facebook in particular, is catching up.

Within the last five years, Myanmar’s media landscape has undergone significant change. Prior to 2013, the prepublication censorship and the lack of independent media made access to reliable information difficult. Although the internet and mobile technologies had arrived in the country, few had access to this. The price of a sim card could cost up to 300 USD and Myanmar had one of the world’s lowest mobile user penetration rates. In 2018 the picture changed dramatically. Today Myanmar’s media landscape is far more diverse, and the population has access to an ever-growing number of media on a variety of platforms. However, very few studies have explored what these changes in the media landscape have meant for Myanmar’s news consumers.

IMS Programme Development Advisor Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen, explains:

“People in Myanmar today have a broader selection of media to choose from. Most significant is of course the arrival of independent newspapers and the Internet, with Facebook now being the media of choice. This has altered the way people consume news and receive information in Myanmar.”

However, people still have limited access to information.

“Facebook clearly helps to fill the information gaps around the country – especially in rural areas. It provides news faster than any other media,” says Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen.

Although only 34 percent of the population has a Facebook profile, the study shows that the reach of the platform is far bigger, with most people knowing what Facebook is.

While Facebook does help to fill the information void, access to *reliable* information that can be verified remains limited.

“Many people are aware that you cannot believe everything you read on Facebook, but with few or no options to fact-check information available to them, they have to make do with what is easily accessible,” says Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen.

Trusting the media

People’s trust in media differs, but many tend to see state-owned media as the media that delivers the most trustworthy and reliable news and information.

“Especially when it comes to official information like salary levels and education entry requirements, state-owned media is seen as a trusted source. This most likely stems from the fact that state-owned media has been the only source of information in this country for decades, and therefore a media source that people naturally turn to,” explains Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen.

Besides the state-owned media, people have a clear preference for locally based media. Yangon-based media is not a relevant news source to many people living outside the bigger cities. People feel that these media do not present them with news or information that relates to their daily lives and they are often too elitist in their reporting. Relevant news is local news, according to the study.

Gendered news topics

The study also showed differences between men and women's perception of news.

“Women often associate news with topics such as education and health, whereas men are more interested in economy and politics. This reflects the traditional gender roles which are still evident across the country where men are often more involved in decision making groups or communities and women are often caretakers of the family,” Emilie Lehmann-Jacobsen concludes.

About the study

The study *Myanmar's media from an audience perspective* was carried out by International Media Support and Fojo Media Institute (IMS-Fojo) and Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMRef) in May 2018. The data collection was undertaken in May 2018. A total of 168 participants took part in the qualitative study from the regions of Yangon, Mandalay, Rakhine and Kachin. The study is qualitative using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

International Media Support and Fojo Media Institute are working to support Myanmar media partners in their efforts to develop independent and accountable media as a driver of positive social and political change.

The full study can be found here:

https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Audiences-in-Myanmar_2018_finalweb.pdf

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