

# Social Media: An Emerging Reporting Tool for Working Journalists

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## Article Info

Volume 83

Page Number: 5527 - 5536

Publication Issue:

March - April 2020

## Abstract:

Social media has finally found an entry into traditional print newsrooms and it is also gaining acceptance among journalists for professional use. New posts like social media editors and mobile editors are also being created in the newsrooms recently. A digital-age journalist is expected to not just write but also find innovative ways to sell the news stories on multiple platforms which calls for a topical study to explore the contemporary trends in Indian newspaper industry. The present paper is an attempt to know the attitudes of editors and reporters towards social media usage as a reporting tool. Survey with a sample size 70 was directed at editors as well as reporters to examine their reactions, skills needed to thrive as a new-age journalist and how this is impacting the field of journalism data was collected through snowball sampling technique. Majority of the senior editors contacted for the study from top eight English and Hindi language newspapers located in Jammu, India. Results indicated that social networking sites are being used by most of the senior editors to post news stories. 84 per cent journalists agreed that they are using social media to the extent of even generating news story ideas. Apart from that, concerns are also raised by editors and reporters on the importance of field work and future of investigative reporting especially in the age of social media.

## Article History

Article Received: 24 July 2019

Revised: 12 September 2019

Accepted: 15 February 2020

Publication: 28 March 2020

**Keywords:** social media; fifth estate; network theory; network journalism; digital journalism.

## Growing social media presence

The consumption of information is definitely changing in the contemporary society. Gone are the days when people waited for their morning papers or aligned their schedules to a particular time slot in order to watch news on TV.

Press was once considered to be the Fourth Estate or Fourth Pillar of Democracy and now social media is emerging as the Fifth Estate (William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute in 2007). According to Dutton "we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks which can act independently of the traditional media. Highly networked individuals can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions." Dutton (former BBC Future Media Controller)

According to the recent India Digital News Report (2019), 68% respondents used smartphones as their main device to access news online. This clearly shows the future trend of news in India, (Zeenab Aneez T. A., 2019).

According to the KPMG 2018 report, Internet penetration in India is expected to grow to 52 per cent by 2021 and number of Internet-enabled smartphone users would reach 650-700 million by 2020 whereas active social media users in India will be 370 million by 2022. Besides, the average time spent per day by mobile internet users on online activities will be 200 minutes. These facts build a strong foundation for growth of social networks. Widespread mobile internet access across India and a growing number of social media users have led news organizations to invest in social media.

## Social Networking - Sites & Purpose

According to (Boyd D and Ellison, 2007) “Social Networking Sites (SNS) are web based services that allow individuals to build a semi-public or public profile within a specified system, find other users that share a similar connection and view their list of connections.” Reach, engagement and individual interaction are the prime reasons of using social networking sites. Social groups help in making personal and direct social ties (Tonnie, 2002). Besides, it is the need for belonging, which motivates people to preserve the social connection. Due to this new form of media, it is easy to identify influencers driving cultural, social and political change, (Furht, 2010).

### ***Types of Social Media***

There are three main types of social network services. First is the socializing- Social Network Services (SNS), which are used for socializing with existing friend, for example Facebook.

Secondly, networking- used for non-social interpersonal communication, for example LinkedIn and the third is the social navigation- social network services that are used for helping users to find specific information or resource, for example Goodreads for books. Collaborations can be open or closed and enables people to create knowledge; Wikipedia is an example of this.

Apart from this there are blogs, micro blogs and Vlogs that can be also added to the types of SNS (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Blogs are descriptive content pages, interactive in nature, created and maintained by individual users posting text, photos and links to other web sites. Readers could leave their comments on the page whereas Microblogs have a typical restriction traditionally of 140 characters or less and now up to 280 characters which allows users to write and share content for example Twitter is the most popular micro-blogging site. Video Blogs or Vlogs that are available on various blogging sites that use video as their main form of content, supported by text. YouTube is the largest video sharing site.

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Social Media and Journalism***

According to Alejandro (2010) here is no doubt the revolution brought by new media in the human society, the way information is saved, shared, searched or consumed. Started in 1998, Google finally has become an alternate to the word search and post this first wave of innovation another revolution is changing the societies, cultures and business in the form of Social Media further he added that Social media was introduced in India somewhere in the year 2008 and it is interesting to note how social media has found an entry into newsrooms and gaining acceptance among journalists due to its influence as a communication and news-breaking tool. On one hand, social media networks and web 2.0 applications are opening new opportunities for news industry and on the other hand they are changing the roles and functions of a traditional journalist and media organizations. A digital age journalist is essentially multi-tasking and submitting stories for multiple platforms. Also, new posts like social media editors are being created for editors in the newsrooms (Alejandro, 2010). The pace of change has increased in the past one decade and these technological changes have created more social ways of doing journalism as more people could be heard and more voices could be included now. The focus is less on what platforms to use rather it's on whom to speak to and connect with and how to go about doing that. Everyone steers their way through the network via connections and journalists are no different, In the social media ecology, journalism is flourishing on participation and connections rather than a top-down approach. There is a lot of information in the crowd, but journalists are still learning how to collaborate with users. Unlike traditional media, social media allows many voices and participants, sites and streams. The news products are more divergent and are incorporating multiple voices (Megan Knight, 2013).

In 2010 Lievrouw & Livingstone said that change can be promoted into a social system through a domino effect and it is the personal characteristics and interaction of innovative groups which enhances the domino effect (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2010). Considering the contemporary media trends one can easily predict that social media certainly upholds the potential to be creating the domino effect by challenging the system's view. Besides, dynamics of technology adoption, rate of adoption and spread of the innovation into a social system would define the future of media and more specifically social media. In a similar study influence of mobile and social media on mainstream media coverage of 'India against Corruption' movement was studied and it was found that social media was being used for setting an inter-media agenda setting. Most importantly social media was also being used to empower youth by providing them a platform to express.

Another interesting shift seen in the news industry is from gatekeeping to gatewatching. Gatekeeping practice of journalism according to Burns (2014) is challenged by new gatewatching done by bloggers and other online communities who curate and evaluate news and other information provided by official sources. Role of journalists as gatekeepers of information is lost. In the complex media environment it is unlikely that media could ever drive public debate alone. Specialist news organization, journalists with unique expertise might do well in the given situation but it is interesting to note how journalism has now become a mass participation activity. Newspapers are shifting to online platforms and digital intervention is shaping the work of newspaper journalists both as a source of news as well as medium of distribution. Effects of convergence on Indian newsrooms are finally visible. There is a growing acceptance of web and social media by journalists as a reliable source of primary and secondary information. Workflow in a newsroom is managed by content management

systems and news articles use multimedia approach in the present newsroom operations (Aneez, 2016).

### **Theoretical motivation**

According to Alvin Toffler with the advent of Internet most countries are transitioning into information age also called the third wave post the industrial age. In the post-modern era media has taken a new turn with a shift from analogue to digital technology. There is a transition in developing countries from Industrial Age Society (Second Wave) to Information Age (Third wave society). According to Manuel Castell (2010) in the present age, societies have moved from mass media system to a more diversified and flexible multimedia system which allows integration of all sources of communication into a hypertext (Castells, 2010). Manuel Castells calls this a self-directed mass communication mainly for two reasons. First the message is diffused with the help of Internet up to a reach of almost the entire planet and secondly it is initiated by individuals or groups often bypassing the system thereby forming a horizontal communication networks. There has been a structural shift in the Indian public sphere which according to various studies is going to be next big challenge for journalism in India. Social media impact is seen in case of inter-media agenda setting, especially considering its impact in engaging younger and educated class in India. A strong relationship between the media and public agendas support the fact that increasing use of mobile phones and social media does impact the media's coverage of protests as it was seen during the 'Anna movement' in India (Rodrigues U. M., 2019). Indian media and journalists too are keeping a track of what's happening in these social media groups and platforms as almost all the editors and prominent journalists from both newspapers as well as TV channels have their presence on Twitter. Besides, inter-media agenda setting is also seen between traditional media and blogs. Traditional media, on one hand, acts as the main source for blogs while on the other hand one can see how blogs are also

impacting the agenda of traditional news media. Is social media going “back to the roots” of the internet’s starting point when individuals ruled the roost instead of big corporations? Social media prospects for consumer use and business prospects will determine the future of journalism, which will have the presence of both virtual and real besides evolving from over-sharing of information (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Other questions that need to be answered is the need for journalism in the Internet era and need for press in democracies especially the relationship between journalism and democracy which so far through news was centered on story-telling and based on facts (Schudson, 2008). Creative destruction occurs when an innovation, such as the Internet, revolutionizes an industry on one hand and destroys the market positions of those committed to old technologies or practices (A.Schumpeter, 2003). It is a process of industrial mutation that transforms the economic structure by destroying the old ones and creating new ones. For instance, big companies are controlling the advertising thereby forcing news organizations to rethink their processes and structures. As per the World Economic Forum (2018) report, Facebook and Google are 70 per cent responsible for recommending online traffic, but due

to reducing cost of immersive technology, storytellers are also redefining the content delivery.

### The study aims to find:

1. To know the social media presence of the top circulated news dailies of India.
2. To Explore social media beliefs and usage by editors and reporters of top English and Hindi news dailies.
3. To know the Use of social media for covering specific news beats.
4. To study the Influence of social media on news reporting.

### Research Methodology

A Sample of total of eight- English and Hindi dailies (Dainik Bhaskar, Dainik Jagran, The Times of India, Hindustan, Amar Ujala, The Hindu, Punjab Kesari and Hindustan Times) for the present paper. Data was collected from 35 senior editors and 31 reporters to explore the social media attitudes & beliefs, usage & distribution patterns to understand the changing media scenario and bring out how social media is emerging as a source of information through the perspective of editors and reporters of these news dailies.

### Findings & discussion

Table 1. Social media beliefs of editors

Personal Information source	Learning SM skills	Favourite SNS	SNS to post news stories	SNS used to beat competition	SM information source for journalist
Newspaper	54%	Yes 74%	Twitter 49%	Yes 91%	Yes 74%
TV	0%	No 26%	Facebook 46%	No 9%	No 26%
SNS	37%			other 9%	
Others	9%				

While studying the social media usage and beliefs of editor, it was found that 74% editors alearning social media skills and 91% are using social networking sites to post news stories. 66% agreed that they used SNS to beat competition and 74% editors agreed that presence and popularity of social media mostly by

political leaders can’t be ruled out in present times, so editors accepted that it is imperative for them to check what’s happening on social networking sites and in that sense it is becoming the main source of news for journalists.

**Table 2. Social media usage of editors**

Time spend on SNS daily	Response rate	Favourite SNS feature	Response rate	SNS used to receive news	Response rate	SNS used to disseminate news	Response rate
less than an hour	31%	Speed	26%	News agency	6%	Twitter	34.29%
1-2 hours	23%	More Sources	43%	Facebook	29%	Facebook	49%
2-4 hours	26%	Likes	0	Twitter	54%	Blogs	0
4-6 hours	11%	Video Sharing	3%	Blogs	0	Others	14%
6 hours/ more	9%	Easy to share	26%	Others	11%		
		Other	3%				

**Table 2** shows that around 26% editors are spending around 2-4 hours on a daily basis on social networking sites to track and follow political leaders. There is a change in the pattern of information being received by editors themselves. 43% editors like social media as it provides them more sources and they claim it to be their most favourite Social Networking Site (SNS) feature. 54% editors agreed that Twitter is becoming their news source and 49% use SNS to disseminate news.

**Table 3a. Social media beliefs of reporters**

Workload per day	SM to post news stories	SM for story ideas	SM main source for journalist	Learning Skills	SM
1-5 stories	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
5-10 stories	No	No	No	No	No
52%	81%	84%	52%	61%	39%
Field work in digital times	Pressures from seniors to use SM	News Verification	Investigative reporting in Social Media age		
Positive	25%	83%	49%		
Negative	53%	3%	26%		
Neutral	22%	14%	9%		
No Response	0	0	15%		

As far as social media beliefs & usage of reporters is concerned, shows that 52% reporters write 1-5 news stories on a daily basis and almost 81% reporters are using social media to post news stories mainly to enhance their reach and increase their visibility, which has been missing so far especially in the field of print journalism. 39% reporters are learning social media skills to post news stories and 84% use social media to generate story ideas. 52% reporters consider social media to be the main source

of news for journalists and 49% agreed and gave positive feedback when asked regarding the need for investigative reporting in the age of social media. When asked regarding the future of journalism in the age of social media .86% reporters emphasized on

the need for field work in the age of social journalism and 83% feel the need for verification is even more crucial in present times especially when “news is there every where”.

**Table 3b: Social media usage of reporters**

Breaking News	Sharing News	Posting information	Story idea	Story promotion	Connect with audience	Network with journalists	Traffic to site	Other
30%	0	11%	0%	4%	2%	7%	9%	7%
<b>Trusted media to follow terror attack stories by Reporters</b>								
Print	26%	TV	26%	Digital	19%	Social Media	23%	Other
<b>Types of beats covered on SM</b>								
Crime News	19%	Education News	26%	Health News	3%	Economic news	6%	Local Politics
							39 %	Entertainment/Bollywood
<b>Favourite SM feature to disseminate news</b>								
Speed	29%	More Sources	13%	Likes	6%	Video Sharing	6%	Easy to Share
							42%	other
<b>SM used for breaking Terror Attack stories</b>								
Facebook	35 %	Twitter	23%	YouTube	3%	other	39%	
<b>SM has improved journalists' work</b>								
Strongly Agree	23%	Agree	42%	Neither agree nor disagree	19%	Disagree	16%	Strongly Disagree
								0

Around 42% reporters find it is easy to share news post using social networks and 29% reporters liked social media for the speed with which it disseminates news almost the real-time reporting is finally finding its place in print media too. As far as types of beats being covered by reporters using social media is concerned , 39% reporters said they used it mainly to cover local politics, followed by education news 26% and crime news only 19%. However, the least covered beats remain economics; entertainment and health. In times of natural disasters and human tragedy , around 35% reporters

agreed using social media to break terror news stories while 30% used it to break other news stories. The only issues still remain in the heartland or conflict zones of India are the internet connectivity and government’s choice. Apart from meeting other deadlines related to news stories, shows around 25% reporters feel, to add to their existing pressures another building up pressure from seniors is insisting reporters to be increasing their social media presence and using social media for work. Interestingly, 42% reporters however agreed that their work quality has improved by using social media .

## Conclusion

Influence of social media is changing the profession of journalism and journalists as a part of society are no different not be affected by this change. The present study showed that all the news organizations have Facebook, Twitter and Youtube presence followed by Google+ and other online platforms such as Instagram, blogs is gradually catching up with reporters and editors from both English and Hindi news dailies to connect with the youth.

The results clearly indicate that diffusion of technology can be experienced in Indian news rooms. 54% editors agreed that Twitter is becoming their news source and 49% use SNS to disseminate news moreover 84% reporters are using social media to generate story ideas. It is understood from the results of the study that there is a shift in terms of news sources and distribution platforms. Journalists are able to expand their network of news source as well as expand their news reach with the help of social media. Social media seems to be gradually having its strong influence on journalism and the traditional top-down model of journalism is also losing its relevance in online space.

While talking to reporters and editors it was also studied that social media to a great extent is acting as a disruptive technology, challenging the top-down and traditional hierarchal systems thereby giving more power to reporters to select, express, network and connect. Their roles are nature of job is also changing. They are expected to use social media sites to monitor content, post news stories and also participate in live discussions for newspaper's social media platforms to increase online visibility. 39% reporters are using social media to cover local politics, followed by education and crime news beats. With the help of Internet and a news horizontal approach, journalists are now positioned into diverse social networks. The challenge however remains are citizen journalists, bloggers and other pressure groups. Most importantly, present results

indicate a change in media ecology in its form, content, style, sources and reach. Looking at the global scenario a case in point could be that of the Associated Press which encourages journalists to have social media accounts. Though the reporters are not posting confidential information, but they are expected to use profile pictures and identify themselves as AP reporters, In India, however, no such expectations are being formally imposed on reporters or editors so far.

Pattern of new ecology of news production seems to be going social and there is no denying the fact that there is a change in the communication patterns of the present tech savvy generation too. Studies prove that today's youth often feels alienated in the real world. Social trend on one end is cementing public and mass communication but on the flip side it is also weakening interpersonal communication and thus impacts building reliable news sources. Building reliable sources however which could be a future challenge for reporters covering sensitive beats like crime etc. Another emerging problem for news content could be the user-generated content that leads to more plagiarism and creates a new challenge for Intellectual Property Rights.

Various other problems being faced by journalists in sourcing news online however remains verification of facts. Sites containing unreliable information, badly sourced information and lack of source credibility are some of the emerging problems being faced by journalists while sourcing online news content. This makes a point for the need to redefine news and expand its understanding. Making a clear distinction between news and information, especially in times of present information overload perhaps seems to be the need-of-the-hour. Besides, a need for even stronger desk in newspapers to looks into the content on a more serious note is also felt through this study. However, the-need-of-the-hour remains newsroom training and development of online research skills among reporters and editors.

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