RECONSTRUCTING PRINT JOURNALISM: THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA

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Abstract:

Mass media, the world over, has undergone dramatic changes in form, content and substance. New media and the concomitant information and communication technology, has shifted the traditional communication from one-to-many to many-to-many; media ownership patterns are converging, cross media ownership is the order of the day especially in countries like India. Media habits of the audience are constantly evolving; 'the primary unit in which the media consumption takes place' — the family is also undergoing remarkable changes. (Bryant & Miron, 2004, p. 662).

Diffusion of Innovation:

The diffusion process is a significant research interest in communication. Since some of the earliest diffusion research was published in the 1960s, communication scholars have published nearly 500 diffusion studies (Rogers & Singhal, Diffusion of Innovations, 1996). In the past decade, English media newsrooms have begun to integrate internet-based resources for research in the news-gathering process.

Rogers has noted that the decision to adopt or not to adopt an innovation is not impulsive, but involves a deliberate process. The decision is a factor of active information-seeking and information-processing behavior. Rogers' model identified five sequential stages that occur in the process of adoption of innovations such as new communication technologies. They are: (1) knowledge about, or exposure to, the innovation; (2) formation of favorable or unfavorable attitudes, or persuasion; (3) a decision to adopt or reject; (4) implementation; and (5) confirmation-reinforcement (Rogers, 1995)

Rogers' theory maintains that the rate of adoption of innovations is influenced by relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Rogers has also described the concept of critical mass required for adoption of interactive innovations. This occurs when a sufficient number of users has been reached to create a 'self-sustaining' rate of adoption. According to Rogers: 'The interactive quality of the new media creates a certain degree of interdependence among the adoption decisions of the members of a system', (Rogers, 1995, p. 513). This means, simply, that there needs to be enough users to make the innovation appealing and useful to other potential users.

After critical mass is achieved, the rate of adoption accelerates. Interactivity, is the reason why a "critical mass" of individuals usually must occur before the rate of adoption of an interactive technology takes off into rapid growth. Critical mass for interactive technology is different from conventional innovation adoption. It is reached much earlier in the passage of time after an innovation is introduced, resulting in a steeper increase rate for the number of users. Behaviour of individuals and the larger system in which they belong is a significant factor (Rogers, 1995).

New Media:

The digital revolution in information and communication technologies has created the platform for a free flow of information, ideas and knowledge across the globe. The new media (internet) has been able to incorporate all other means of communication the newspaper, magazine, radio, television, cinema, photographic image, and video. The consequence is the Internet divergence from mass communication. Not only has it led to normative rethinking on the traditional role of the press, it has also led to the adaptation of publication roles. Apart from the more apparent evolution of the content in mainstream mass media, it has also led to a rethinking of the role of the media professionals. Added to this is the greater 'interiority' and also 'interactivity' of the audience, which is no longer regarded as a passive entity. The fragmentation and blurring of the media institution is fallout. It is no longer an impervious monolith, but subject to constant evolution by the audience. The proliferation of the new media also leads to reduced social control. (McQuail, 2005, p. 140).

The hyper-local media is now accessible on the international platform. New media outlets have now made it possible for highly differentiated local discourse to be available to a wider transnational media. Interest groups now easily access alternative voices that were hitherto available only to a smaller community audience, across national boundaries. Apart from a plethora of content available for dissemination, new technology also makes it possible for patterns of similar events and issues to be associated across various societies. Solutions to local problems are no longer restricted to the community themselves but are picked up by interest

groups, the world over and projected as exemplars. One of the earlier academic discourses on new media emphasized the following 'new' elements in new media.

Opposed to the traditional mass media role of one-to-many communication, where the source of communication was largely anonymous and impersonal, new media enables many to many conversations. Classical theories of mass communications are being reworked for the new media, because of its structural differences. The new media has also removed passivity among the media audience by enabling simultaneous reception, alteration and redistribution of cultural objects. It dislocates communicative action from the posts of the nations, provides instantaneous global contact and inserts the late modern subject into a machine apparatus that is networked (Poster, 1999, p. 15).

Marshal McLuhan had first associated technology with content in his celebrated treatise. He outlined four different media cultures. The first was the ancient culture of oral communication, exemplified by many of the old Sanskrit texts followed by a literature culture using the phonetic alphabet and a handwritten script which coexisted with the oral culture. The third progression, according to McLuhan described as 'The Gutenberg Galaxy' was that of mass-produced mechanical printing. Finally we are in the midst of what is known as the culture of the 'electric media' — radio, television and computers. (McLuhan, 1964).

But as we have seen earlier, computer mediated communication provides a separate media culture altogether. The important characteristics of the new media are that media texts are dematerialized in the sense that they are separated from their physical — newsprint — form. The data can be compressed into very small spaces and it can be accessed at very high speeds in non-linear ways. (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2003, p. 16).

The media culture represented by the new media provides for a new textual experience. Digital technology has made it possible for new genres and new textual forms to be a part of the media output. It also allows for new ways of representing the world, especially with the use of audiovisual multimedia technology. The relations between content and technology is more profound than ever before, which has not only led to new

patterns of organization and production, but also new ways of distribution and consumption. (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2003, pp. 12-13).

Information Society:
The shift to new media and its attendant consequences has been simultaneous with three other strands in social science, the most prominent of which is a shift from modernity to post modernity. Post modernity implies a nation-state challenged by new world views: feminism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, etc. It rejects the modernist ideals of rationality, virility, artistic genius, and individualism, in favour of anti-capitalist, contemptuous of traditional morality, and committed to radical egalitarianism. (Jameson, 1991). This is accompanied by the intensifying processes of globalisation, which has recently been more defined in terms of interdependence. Post modernism is also characterized by the emergence of the postindustrial information economy. (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2003, p. 10)

The primary thesis of postindustrial information is that the society from the early 1990s has been undergoing a profound economic, cultural, and social structural shift. This is as important as earlier transformations such as the Industrial Revolution. This new information society has been shaped by a variety of forces, the most important of which is the revolution in information technology described as a "new technological paradigm" (Castells, 2000, p. 9). Castells argues that the primary result of the combined forces of the information revolution and existing social tensions is a re-structuring of the social order on the basis of networks of business, personal, and cultural relationships. He defines this society as the "network society." This has given birth to a new economic system. The fundamental and distinctive features of the new economy are the use of information and knowledge as important resources.

Alvin Toffler (1980) generated huge debate for the information society by inventing new terms, such as "new civilization" and "intelligent environment". (Toffler, 1980). He characterized major social transformations in the information society as large shifts in the organization of society driven by technological change (Kling, 1994, p. 154) He regarded the transformation from the industrial age to the information age as a "quantum leap forward," supporting this with new terminologies of his own, such as "techno-sphere," "infosphere," "demassified media".

The genealogy of the term Information Society is traced to the work of the American sociologist Daniel Bell. According to him the main characteristics of the post-industrial society were found in predominance of the service sector where "theoretical knowledge" overran manufacture and agriculture infrastructure. It also led to the emergence of a new class — which possessed these special knowledge skills. (Bell, 1976)

According to McQuail, the Information Society is characterized by :
• Predominance of Information work
• Great and accelerating volume of information work
• Problems of information overload
• Integration and convergence of activities
• Growth of interconnected networks
• Globalising tendencies
• Dependence on complex systems
• Loss of privacy
• Reduced constraints of time and space
• Depoliticisation (McQuail, 2005, p. 108)

Objectivity:
The formal structure of news production involves four distinct processes. The first of which is planning. It consists of reducing the uncertainty of tasks by plotting events in advance and determining which is to become news. The planning process usually takes place at the editorial meetings, which usually is an exercise in the limited discretion involved in the news selection process. (Golding & Elliott, 1999, p. 113).
The second process of news production involves the gathering process, the specialization of the reporter is an important element in the news gathering process. The other two processes are that of selection and presentation which largely is the domain of sub-editors. (Golding & Elliott, 1999).

There has been considerable debate over journalistic objectivity over the years. An important contribution in this field demonstrates how constructions of objectivity have reflected the changing economic, social, and moral climates in which journalism has been practiced over the last century and a half. (Stoker, 1995). Another important stream of scholarly thought describes objectivity as an ideology rather than a value. It suggests that its rise was part of a backlash against post-World War I propaganda. At that time, journalistic objectivity was synonymous with neutrality, or the separation of facts from values and opinions. Objectivity was understood

as an ideal counter to the reality of the reporter's own subjectivity. (Schudson, 1990, p. 268).
One of the most quoted works on objectivity describes it as a "strategic ritual" used to protect journalists from risk or attack. The four strategic procedures in the ritual comprise of a) Presentation of Conflicting Possibilities; b) Presentation of Supporting Evidence; c) The judicious use of quotation marks and d) Structuring Information in an important sequence. (Tuchman, 1999)

(Ognianova & Endersby, 1996) argue that journalistic objectivity is a strategic device for economic goals. It is a tactic deliberately used by news organizations to position journalists as political centrists, in the interests of increasing market shares among audiences and also to maximize their audience.

Similarly, (Chomsky, 1989) stresses on the organizational factors that determine the choice of topics and variable coverage given to issues, the range of accepted opinions that guide reporting and commentary, which he describes as a a certain view of the world.

Objectivity in recent years has shifted away from the focus on neutrality and toward a foregrounding of accuracy, balance, and fairness.
Objectivity in the more contemporary sense of impartiality is consonant with another important goal in news production-pluralism, the journalistic mandate to represent a diversity of positions and voices in the interests of responsibility to the public.

Outside the discourse of journalism, (Cunnigham, 1973) identifies the significant arguments against objectivity as: a) the values argument, which contends that scientists' values, psychology, background, etc., influence the selection of problems and the conclusions drawn; b) the historicist argument, which maintains that scientific enterprise is limited by its historical context; and c) the selection argument, which describes scientific method as a series of ad hoc choices made by an investigator from an almost limitless set of possibilities. (Cunningham, 1973, p. 21).

(Durham, 1998) quotes the 1995 ASNE ethics guidelines which according to her incorporate a move toward reflexivity. The ASNE urges reporters to ask themselves the following questions before beginning the process of news production.
1. What assumptions and preconceived views do we

bring to the table-how do these preconceived views shape our news coverage before we even begin to frame the story?

2. What is the essence of the story-how should we frame our coverage to capture where the issue begins, the nuances of the situation and the meaning people are conveying?

3. How are we listening and to whom-what voices do we need to cover to
illuminate news coverage and how do we need to tap into the many dimensions of
our communities to find those voices?

4. How might we think about our coverage over time-when we think about
our coverage over time, what do our conversations within the newsroom need to
sound like and what existing perspectives, experience and knowledge do we need
to tap within the newsroom?

The question then becomes how the media persons who are privileged to study, write, and speak about "social outsiders" can do so without either (1) replicating conventional biases, (2) inauthentically using others' voices to make false claims of being able to see from their marginalized perspectives, or (3) legitimating false knowledge claims? (Durham, 1998, p. 132)

New Media as a Resource for Journalists:
Traditional print and broadcast media journalism has a complicated relationship with the internet. On the one hand, the internet is a very useful tool in news production. With it, journalists can search for background information to put stories in perspective, search through archives, contact sources via emails and interact with readers through social media. A whole range of official documents is also available online. Every kind of a resource that a journalist requires to produce a complete story is also available on the net. Web logs are also an important source of information for the journalist for local issues as well as opinions expressed by a multiplicity of interest groups that helps provide a balanced perspective on various issues. More importantly, the internet allows alternative and non-official voices to be heard. The mainstream media by its very nature has to allow for official versions of events. Alternative sources of information are not encouraged. Often these voices are more important to get a true picture of events and issues.

The internet also provides a platform for non-domi-

nant views, which by definition are precluded from the mainstream media. For a journalist, these expressions of opinion from community leaders and interest groups may serve as a new direction for investigative journalism. Earlier, the local newspapers performed these functions. Very often big national stories including the infamous Bhagalpur blinding were first reported by intrepid small newspapers and then picked up national newspapers. But physical proximity to these small media outlets were limited. New media allows these local views a global platform.

The internet also provides convenient access to a wider range of international news outlets, benefiting especially those media outlets that do not have sufficient resources for foreign news coverage (Callahan, 1999). Technology does not just impact the content of the media but its form as well. It has been well documented that the print media for example is lot more visual due to the impact of television and internet. Graphics and page design software has made it possible for newspapers to provide even complex statistical information graphically. Various design elements including colour tints, illustrations, cutouts etc are easily possible with the new technology.

Various forms of new media technology also allows for greater interactivity and audience participation. Sms polls are almost an indispensable part of traditional front page dailies these days.
However, it also poses a challenge to mainstream journalism by facilitating alternative methods of news production and dissemination. Internet technology, especially with the onset of broadband has led to the the rise of 'online news services', ranging from those offered by commercial portals to those operated by individual 'online journalists'. More fundamentally, producing online news involves skills, judgments and routines different to those in mainstream news work (Stein, 1999).
Some observers thus argue that the shift from print to online newspapers involves changes not only in information infrastructure, structural relationships among journalists, sources and audiences, but also the very definition of news (Boczkowski, 2001). (Chan, Lee, & Pan, 2006).

Initial research into the adoption of online news pointed out a number of factors for the adoption of this format. Of these, the ease and convenience of online news and

the specific features generating this characteristic for example, round the clock availability, and the ability to combine news use with other online purposes seem to be the most important. (Nguyen, 2010, p. 225).

In a survey cited by Nguyen, 45 per cent of the users said they preferred online news because of its convenience and easy accessibility. Eleven per cent of those interviewed preferred online news since it was 'available when you want it.' Eight per cent of the respondents preferred timeliness and immediacy of news. Speed of news access was the preferred reason of choice for seven percent respondents.

(Nguyen, 2010) also cites a a Nielsen/NetRatings study for Washingtonpost.com in 2005. The findings were that the internet was selected over traditional media chiefly due to two convenience-related features – round-the-clock availability (83% of users) and the ability to multitask (70%) – with 'easy ways to get information' coming fourth (63%) and 'convenience of use' sixth (61%).

(Salwen, Garrison, & Driscoll, 2005) cited in (Nguyen, 2010) reported a number of reasons for using news online. Being able get news 'at any time I want' was proffered by 95% of users. 91% users cited being able to go directly to news of interest. 88 per cent felt online news was a quick and easy way to keep up with the news, while 84 per cent of the respondents felt online news was convenient to receive. 82 per cent users learnt more about breaking stories on the internet. For 71 per cent users online news was easier to get than conventional news. 68 per cent found their interests reflected on news sites. The same percentage of respondents preferred online news since they were exposed to interesting news stories while doing some other things online. 65 per cent were able to get different viewpoints while online news items when logging on or off the computer caught six out of ten respondents. The same number of people found unusual news stories online the same as the news that was not available elsewhere. The other reasons were being able to get more news than from conventional sources (57%); and being able to get more depth than conventional news (52%).

The above study reported four dimensions: convenience of use, quantity and quality of news, difference of online news from traditional news, and serendipity. (Nguyen, 2010)

In response, mainstream journalists, hold a generally negative attitude toward the internet. They are concerned with source credibility, information reliability and difficulties in verifying facts. (Chan, Lee, & Pan, 2006, p. 927).

On the downside a number of consequences, not just limited to the content has been pointed out. As a part of a larger profit-seeking conglomerate online news operation may open up more layers of news production to market pressure. In addition, the 'anything goes' mode of generating content for websites has posed serious threats both to ways of doing journalism and operationally defining professional standards and ethics. Specific technological possibilities also create problems for journalists who value the traditional newsmaking process. The 24-hour deadline and the public's expectation of 'non-stop breaking news', for example, have led to concerns that online news operators rush information to press rather than taking the time to channel it through a vigorous gatekeeping process. In addition, the customization or personalization of news products has led to concerns with fragmentation of the mass audience (Chan, Lee, & Pan, 2006, p. 927).

The flexibility and fluidity expected in the digital media industry is based primarily on time, which brings new pressures and demands on the workers who work with the internet (Deuze, 2007). With the internet, time has been compressed. News online is also influenced by this compressed dimension and has, as one of its characteristics, immediacy. Online news sites are updated, to different degrees, around the clock. The audience, in its turn, expects to be able to find updated news on the internet. (Weiss & Joyce, 2009, p. 598)

A paradigm for journalists' perception of online resources:
A recent study (Chan, Lee, & Pan, 2006) has suggested the following parameters for studying perception of online resources.

Website credibility: With a huge number of online resources available on every conceivable issue, believability of websites of traditional media outlets and those of other online companies is under question.

Web surfing behaviour and attitudes toward the internet. (Chan, Lee, & Pan) used the five-point scale to assess respondents' uses of, and attitudes towards, the internet. The variables included 'I can use the internet skilfully in news reporting'; and (2) 'I am fully adapted

to the multimedia working environment.' Web surfing behaviour is the average of: (1) 'I often browse domestic news websites'; and (2) 'I often browse overseas news websites'. Perceptions of internet potentials for news work is the average of: (1) 'the internet has brought a more open space for news work'; and (2) 'the internet has increased levels of competition in news work significantly.'

Web use at work. Journalists indicate, on a five point scale (where 1 = never and 5 = frequently) whether they often used various kinds of news and information websites at work to: (1) get news leads; (2) gather background information for news stories; and (3) search for news angles.

Specialist orientation is a factor of how often media persons read media and journalism research journals; read trade magazines; and browse the specialized websites devoted to issues and information on journalism.

Evaluation of news media exemplars provides an idea of how close are media outlets to the ideal medium of the respective journalists.

Media role beliefs correspond to the interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and popular advocacy roles of the media.

Perceived competitive pressure is the pressure that the mainstream journalist faces from his online counterpart.

Future of journalism in the digital age:

The digital environment has transformed the mainstream media. The young literate audience who once were expected to become newspaper readers as they matured, no longer do. Their news habits are substantially different from their predecessors. Earlier studies have shown that people used to set aside specific times to 'keep up' with the news – perhaps reading a morning paper, and/or watching TV news broadcasts later. The arrival of 24-hour news networks started eroding that habit; the online environment has completely transformed it. Research reveals that a majority of the young audience essentially consume news in a steady stream of information bites. They are constantly connected, through computers and cell phones, both with each other and with multiple media sources. They are as likely to hear about a major event from a friend's text message or status message on Facebook or Orkut as from TimesNow. In an environment of constant information, already permeable lines between 'news', 'entertainment', and other genres seem to dissipate.

(Bird, 2009)

The mainstream response to the digital challenge has been largely on the content front. One of which has been described as the tabloidization of news. This is ostensibly at the demand of the audience which is no longer interested in hard news. This also entails setting up the personal experience as a legitimate form of knowledge. Described as dumbing down by many authors, the tabloidization perspective seeks to invert hegemonic paradigms and makes obscure topics relevant by linking them to everyday experience of masses. This amounts to linking the public and the private sphere, a charge that is commonly faced by the mainstream media these days. This also inevitably leads to placing private issues in the public arena. Many see this as a democratizing force. Scholars also view this phenomenon as a way of engaging viewers' interests more fully and relevantly.

The two realms that were once considered mutually exclusive; entertain and inform citizens is now enmeshed irretrievably and is often the lifeblood of mainstream media.

The binaries of popular and quality news outlet often described in terms of soft news/hard news, trash/value, personal/political, private/public, popular culture/high culture, emotional/rational, lay knowledge/expert knowledge, celebrity/intellectual, consumer/citizen, trivial/serious, feminine/masculine, profit/service, objectivity/subjectivity, micro politics/macro politics and wants/needs have been blurred beyond recognition. (Harrington, 2008, p. 269)

Popular mainstream journalism now functions at the interstices of these binaries. With the primary function of dispensing information now the sole preserve of more immediate outlets, mainstream media is no longer functioning in the objective gravitas but has to play a more profound role in articulating popular opinion. It is now more a conjunction of the public and the private sphere. The format is as important as the content.

Soft news of no social or political consequence is the staple diet of popular journalism. This is compounded by one-sided subjective opinion inflamed by blogs. This often serves as the basis of regular news stories. Many current anxieties about present day journalism reflect a concern for the news media's presumed function of maintaining a well-informed citizenry. But to such worries we must add another: journalistic vitality

in holding officials and institutions accountable.

'The press can serve as a stand-in for the public, holding the governors accountable – not to the public (which is not terribly interested), but to the ideals and rules of the democratic polity itself", as Michael Schudson has argued (Schudson, 1995, p. 217); but this function as well as that of informing citizens are both threatened by the chronic and progressive degeneration of tough-minded objectivity

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