

## **SMARTPHONE IN JOURNALISM: SHIFT IN NEWS PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION IN INDIAN NEW MEDIASCAPE**

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### **Abstract**

The media industry is involved in a huge way after digitalization. The entry of computers, internet and mobile phones changed the way newsrooms worked and it also challenged the media planners and journalists both financial and workforce end. The smartphone has affected journalists at work, editors at newsroom and readers alike. The current paper tries to study the above-mentioned situation in the new media news production in India. The paper features personal interviews of journalists, editors, media managers of selected new media of India. The paper tries to build a theoretical framework to understand the capacity and limitations of smartphones in Indian newsrooms.

**Keywords:** Smartphone, Mobile Media, Content Management, Digital Economy, Talent, MoJo.

### **1. Introduction**

The role of mass media in a society is considered as vital and unavoidable. The mass media is an important pillar of democracy to a service-based role towards society. The role of the media is to objectively report the news and inform its viewers without bias. In a democratic society, its role is pivotal in keeping the government, companies, and powerful individuals accountable to the masses. The media has the power to spotlight and expose those who abuse their power. The first thing dictators do to control the flow of information is to control the media, what news stories they can run. Their role is to objectively provide the facts in the context they are expected. To deliver the information and news to the public, there is a lot of money involved (Albarran, 2008). A huge amount is spent on media equipment, human resource, talent management and infrastructure. Apart from these regular expenditures, the need for updates and training also costs a huge amount for media owners. This covers copyright, legal and other licensee obligations (Doyle, 2013). The media distribution and audience tracking are another area where the media can't compromise. The content reach ability and popularity lead them to advertising revenue – that is the prime source of income in any media house.

The entry of mobile media in the mass media industry changed the way the news is being produced, distributed and consumed. It not only changed the technological logistics of the media industry but also the economy. The technological convergence of mobile “phones” and media has been taking place since the 1990s, but in India the adoption and adaptation of mobile media in newsrooms is still in early stage. In the context of ongoing economic slowdown or crisis in global industry, the entry of smartphones in the newsroom has liberated the economic crunch for media managers and media planners. Accessing mobile news has gained grip in the daily life of the news audience. On the other hand, the traditional news media like newspapers and television have developed news delivery, by repurposing or customizing journalistic content published for mobile sites and/or applications.

The entry of mobile media in our daily life has changed the way we communicate and deal with day to day routine. The introduction of mobile phones also has an impact on the media industry. Preferably called a smartphone, the news media industry adopted and adapted it for a great extent.

As every industry, the media as an industry also runs based on economic calculations. In the last decade, Indian media saw various cases of layoff and cut off. A part of such incidents was reported due to the entry of smartphones. On other hand, Indian print media industry keeps growing while the major international media houses are shedding their print editions. Digitalization is often blamed for reducing manual roles and shifts in job profile. The growing trend in digital entrepreneurship and opportunities in digital platforms to business opened the new vistas. Same way in journalism, it is wrong to blame smartphones for the worst phase of layoff and shutdowns. However, most traditional media planned and shifted their business to digital or extended their digital wing.

## **2. Smartphone – The Game Changer**

The smartphone is considered a game changer in journalism not only because of its use in news collection and reporting. It also changed the way news edited, disseminated and consumed. Mobile journalism in comparison to conventional methods has many advantages. As per Podger (2018) include affordability, portability, discretion, approachability, and the ease of access for beginners. In the iconic commentary on

future of journalism with reference of mobile journalism Allissa Richardson, the National Association of Black Journalists' 2012 Journalism Educator of the Year stated that " Mobile journalism is an emerging form of new media storytelling where reporters use portable electronic devices with network connectivity to gather, edit and distribute news from his or her community" (2012).

### **3. Methods and Research Design**

Accessing mobile news has gained grip in the daily life of the news audience. On the other hand, the traditional news media like newspapers and television have developed news delivery, by repurposing or customizing journalistic content published for mobile sites and/or applications. The current paper tries to study the above-mentioned situation in the new media news production in India. The paper features personal interviews of journalists, editors, media managers of selected new media of India and analysis of news production and consumption through content analysis.

- The purpose of this research is to understand the entry of Mobile media in the newsroom in terms of economic value and content creation and reach.
- Qualitative Personal Interview with Journalists and Media Managers and Quantitative Digital Ethnography on audience (n=255).
- **Selected area of the study:** Indian New Media News Sphere.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with journalists and media managers to understand how the news media adopted the smartphone and how it changed the news production and newsroom. The results of the personal interviews are discussed in the below sections. The names and affiliation of the media professionals interviewed are kept anonymous for the purpose of privacy. The key findings of ethnographic studies are also discussed in the results.

### **4. Results**

The key results from the above-mentioned interviews and ethnography study are listed below. The points from the interview, review of relevant literature is incorporated with the results.

**4.1 Mobile Ready News:** The popularity of smartphones among the user level is identified during the digital ethnography and it is confirmed by most of the media professionals. During early days of web journalism, the newspaper reports were converted to web text. Later, the web dedicated teams were set up in the newsroom. But now mobile ready or mobile friendly news is in its place. "The headline is now

push notification, the photo series are now slideshows, the breaking news are now social media posts”, said a senior journalist from a national news portal. The audience also feels more comfortable reading or viewing news without changing the features of their default settings of font, orientation and zooming. The mobile responding news are in place.

**4.2 Equipment Shift, Mobile Newsroom and Pop-Up News Desk:** The current research done before the global pandemic of COVID – 19 hit the world. Since then, the importance of mobile reporting and journalism and involvement of social media is seen around the world (Ienca and Vayena, 2020). The safety of journalists on the field, equipment handling, and maintenance became an important aspect during pandemic. But the shift in equipment and emergence of mobile newsrooms in Indian new media sphere is identified during the current study. “Instead of taking the whole crew to the field for live reporting, we are setting up a pop-up news desk with help of smartphones, laptop and internet. This is cost effective and highly functional”, said an editor and media manager of a visual media, also in-charge of digital wing during the 2019 General election.

**4.3 Multi – Role of Journalist:** The role and duties of a journalist is more than reporting and editing. It often extends from social media handling, shooting video and editing it, adding voice over, photo editing and publishing. The reason behind multitasking is not new for Indian journalists, but the smartphone enables journalism to make such roles natural. Most of the media professionals’ interviews agreed that they already took, or planning to take a specialized smartphone journalism course. The digital ethnography indicates that the credibility and popularity of reports also matters in news selection and consumption. This makes a journalist to do fulfil in the caps of multimedia professionals who can reach their audience in any format.

**4.4 Use of Social Knowledge and Shared Journalism:** The concept of shared journalism in the newsroom appeared since the web 3.0 and social media. The content from user generated social media posts often help journalists to pick up news stories which are out of their reach. This proved handy during crises and disasters. The use of social knowledge portals such as Quora, Yahoo Answers and Reddit comes to help

journalists in reporting with smartphones (Chaffey et al, 2019). “The geo-tagged social media posts from respectable social media handles often provide leads for the news. The discussion in social media websites also gives an idea about the public views on events which help in finding and positioning news content”, opined a sub-editor of a media firm who is also in-charge of social media curation.

**4.5 Fake News and Misinformation:** As discussed, above when journalists depend on social media for news leads, they often fall in the trap of misinformation. Thus, the published content backlashes the journalist and media house in the form of fake news. The emergence of fake news is often attributed with the emergence of web and smartphone-based news creation and dissemination. The role of the user in propagating the fake news is also important to notice. In most cases, users are not able to identify and distinguish fake news. The Internet leaders such as Google, Facebook and others started their online training programs for journalists, media professionals and ordinary users to identify and debunk fake news. Human intelligence and common sense need to be strong in detecting and avoiding fake news. “It will be wrong to blame the internet and mobiles alone for spreading fake news, they are just instruments – the reason is we the people ”, opinionated a political editor of national daily and Google verified fake news trainer. The results from digital ethnography also shows that users are exposed to fake news in forms of forwarded messages from instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp rather than a news source. Here it is understood that the meaning of news is changing for a reader as he finds the information on social media as news.

**4.6 Economic Viable:** The economic viability is one main reason why media management shifted their focus from expensive equipment to smartphone and mobile based platforms. The pay cuts and lay off in companies in common during COVID -19 pandemic globally. But Indian media houses faced the issue of downsizing and pay cuts since a decade. It is also an interesting fact that the journalists who are willing to adapt are still working with new digital interfaces and others also developed their own interest in smartphones and started their own social media platforms. The successful media entrepreneurship models are emerging at a global level and it will lead to a new digital economy (Ansong, and Boateng, 2019). The similar cases can be found in Indian new media sphere too. In a sense, it is an opportunity rather than a threat. The

issues in production quality and content is still an issue with smartphones (Gracheva et al, 2019). But recent development in the field of web and application development, artificial intelligence and virtual reality are improving the situation. A regular updating of infrastructure from media management and willingness to update from individual media professionals will deftly peril the smartphone in the workforce.

## **5. Conclusion**

The current study shows that the shift in news production and distribution due to smartphones is more of opportunities for exploring media startup and entrepreneurship. There are successful models of traditional media houses adapted to the new ways of news making by using smartphones in the correct way. The research also shows that the equations of traditional media is no longer valid. The changing role of journalists and emerging of new digital economies are taking their position. It is also showing that audiences are looking for quality content which they relay further. The prominence of social media platforms as news media is a concern for media houses (Carlson, 2020; Napoli, 2019), thus the role of social media managers and journalists in maintaining their social identity becomes important. This leads to a new media ecosphere which is more democratic, efficient, and more public. The meaning of news, from its traditional form, needs to be revisited. The news is now becoming more platform and event oriented than an issue orientated. The quality and content clash as seen in traditional media is also found in smartphone journalism – the objective, independent, and accurate journalistic practice is the key solution for frank news production.

The smartphone is not about how smart your phone is, it is about how smartly you can use your phone – this is applicable to editors, media managers, journalists, and very important – the readers.

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