Many Facets of Online Journalism

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ABSTRACT

The internet has brought a revolution in the world. Cyberspace has invaded the world. The online medium has the features of hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity that make it an ideal medium for collection, dissemination and access of news and events. Online journalism as an offshoot of the internet has marched ahead of traditional media. Online journalism has given rise to e-newspapers and entered electronic media. In many ways, new electronic communication technologies have brought about unprecedented changes especially to the newspaper industry. This paper discusses online journalism, the shift in journalistic culture, the pros and cons, the ethical angles, challenges and opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

From the cradle of cyber space, the concept of Online Journalism evolved. Though Internet journalism is still evolving, its contours are getting sharply defined. Online journalists globally are increasingly becoming aware of the need to develop a new phrase for the medium. The media itself understood that the internet cannot be treated as an extension of the print media despite numerous similarities between the two. This new entrant has various points bandwagon of media landscape and there can be narratives in three different ways – in the text format, in audio mode, and as a video clip. The medium further demands that stories be communicated in different forms – as a news alert; as a wireless headline; and as well as written story on

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the net. The medium further calls for knowledge links, audio and video skills, and some latest skills that go far beyond traditional reporting and editing requirements. Online journalism is the future of traditional journalism. Online journalism is a relatively new medium in the journalism arena. There has been an impetus to online journalism as the Internet and the World Wide Web grew and developed in the recent years. This service was launched by Tim Berners-Lee in 1994. Technology is never constant and is subject to continuous change. Online journalism is growing in limitless ways and there are no boundaries to its progress.

Will online journalism replace traditional journalism or will here be a balance between the two? There has been debate and there has been argument and counter-argument on this. Boynton suggests there will be further blurring between the mediums but that online journalism will supplement traditional media rather than replace them.

Online journalism will continue to develop and gain efficiency and become more effective as technology and multimedia will progress. But, on the flip side there will be some challenges with the expansion of online journalism.

An Ethical Look

Potential problems include various ethical issues, along with the concern that an increase in online niche publications could create social divisions. Others suggest the future of online journalism relies more on a shift in thinking and journalistic culture rather than the progress and inventions of technology (Deuze).The altered format of online journalism changes the focus of journalism from what it has been with traditional mediums. The new focus is connecting to content and other information through hyperlinks and multimedia rather than merely providing packaged individual content. This is a change from traditional media and will gradually determine how journalism will progress as this shift in journalistic culture is further explored.

Development of Online Journalism

Online journalism has been a process that has changed traditional journalism. As new technologies are developed and become more readily available, news organizations such as CNN have incorporated these technologies to enable faster, interactive, non-stop news coverage on the internet.

Videotext was the catalyst for the creation of online news journalism. On November 1993, the first journalism site was launched at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications. The credit for the first newspaper to hare regular publication through the web was the Palo Alto Weekly in California, USA that started on January 19, 1994.

All newspapers that are significant and are meaningful have e-editions today and some have international editions too. The time at which internet edition is available on computer is slightly earlier than the time when the printed newspapers are distributed and there is a competition between newspapers and advance time of the publication of internet edition of the newspaper.

The first newspaper in our country to start the online edition was The Hindu in 1995. Today it has as many as 16 editions. A reader may gain diverse perspectives with access to the editions. The online newspapers are also available on ePaper platform that one may access by web and mobile app. Many newspapers including The Hindu (in 2023) have launched international ePaper editions.

The technology used in concept of online journalism is individual based. The individual based technology can reach large audiences without being insensitive to the idiosyncrasies of individual news consumers. Hence online journalism uses the concept of individual approach of news as contrasted with mass culture of news.

Types of Online Journalism

Mark Deuze places online journalism into these types:
➢ Mainstream news sites (i.e., CNN & BBC),

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➢ Index & category(search engines) sites (i.e., Google, MSN, & Yahoo),

➢ Meta & comment sites (i.e., media watchdogs), and

➢ Discussion and sharing sites (i.e., weblogs and forums) that operates in the context of hypertextuality, multimediality, and interactivity.

Mainstream News Sites: These sites are popular type of web journalism and offer editorial content and participatory (filtered or moderated) communication. The content of this type of news site originates from television stations like CNN or the BBC, from the Internet, or shoveled from an external source or link. Most online newspapers and *Net-native* news sources originated from this type and they use similar approaches that are used in print or broadcasting journalism such as journalistic storytelling, news values, and the relationship it has with audiences.

Index and Category Sites: This type of journalism is mainly associated to search engines (i.e., Yahoo and Google) offering news from existing services and linking to mainstream news without offering editorial content of their own.

Meta and Comment Sites: This category includes sites that deal with general issues related to media, work as media watchdogs (i.e., Freedom Forum and Poynter's Media News), and are intended to be alternative media voices for extended indexes and category sites. Various journalists produce the editorial content for these sites and often facilitate discussions regarding content produced elsewhere on the Internet. Meta and comment sites also direct readers that may be outside the providers of mainstream news to participate by giving these readers a chance to tell their own stories.

Share and Discussion Sites: Utilizing the communication feature of the Internet, these sites provide users a forum to exchange ideas on a diverse range of local and global subjects. The users have a chance to share their own experiences with others.

Online Journalism Opportunities

Today, a web journalist gets numerous avenues and opportunities to acquire response or feedback, feedback, customization, immediate publishing, storage, retrieval, multimedia, all of which are linked to online media production and in particular online news presentation.

Objective of the Study

This study examines how online journalists take advantage of the 'added values' of the Internet: interactivity, hypertextuality and multimediality:

➢ **Interactivity:** Even though interactivity is the main characteristic of concept, we do not have any particular definition to explain interactivity. But let us have a look at two scholars who have tried to define the term. Steuer (1992), says interactivity is "the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time".

➢ So we see how the term has been explained in two different angles.

➢ King (1998) opines, interactivity is evident in the 'control over content'. Also, interactivity is described in terms of feedback and two-way or multiple-way communication ('conversation') between sender and receiver. This kind of interactivity also takes on different forms: e-mail, chat, message boards, etc.

➢ Many experts feel that online or web journalism provide ample avenue to meet deadlines and update content. This is its outstanding feature and provides readers new insights at all hours.

➢ **Hypertextuality:** Online journalism features the utility of hyperlinks which is useful in both compressing and extending information depending on the reader's choice. Hypertext helps the reader to navigate through different parts of the content wherever they are located. This is like a trajectory.

➢ New ways of writing or new ways of telling the readers in narrative style is an offshoot of hypetexting. Journalists have to rise up to the challenges as they have to evolve and compete. Elements like video

elements and multimedia make growth of hypertextuality imperative in the current era.

- ➢ **Multimediality:** Multimedia means the integration of text, images, audio, video towards a common digital form. This is also convergence journalist. This is a step forward and over traditional print media. A journalist must be well versed with multimedia formats and learn new skills. he should have the power to decide which format to use in the story. However, many critics have voiced concerns about this and the obsession of journalist to be technocrazy and place technology over content.

Why Online Newspapers?

In many ways, new electronic communication technologies have brought about unprecedented changes to the newspaper industry. Computerized tools such as word processor, digital typesetting technologies and DTP have brought about higher efficiency in the newsroom and changed the roles of newspaper editors and designers. In addition to improving the quality, the entrance of computers has helped lessen the problems of lack of space for news, high production costs and low profits, although the basics of good journalism that is good writing skills, still apply whether or not new technologies are employed. Advancement in technology can evolve into new media that compete with the newspaper's share of the audience market. The computer era, especially from the 1960s onwards, has created opportunities for videotext providers, commercial online database service-providers and CD ROM producers to offer content on this alternative medium and thus compete against the traditional paper printed newspapers. The progress of the Internet especially the development of WWW propelled online publishing. The interactivity, immediacy and limitless space provided by the Internet have rendered the Internet an ideal medium for online publishing. In addition, the low starting cost, ease of transmission across geographical boundaries and capability of incorporating the multimedia elements are also attractive to the publishers.

Some Contentions about E-publishing

- ➢ As the attention span of e-users is short, text should be concise to catch the eye.
- ➢ This is an area where entertain is the lead factor, making the media a side show.
- ➢ Feelings expressed in the forum cannot be matched by journalistic interpretation and writing skills.
- ➢ The online community is just a fad and lacks responsibility.
- ➢ The Internet contains potential non-readers who only glance through the content once and all the effort on them seems a waste.

Advantages

As with any other journalism, online journalism is subject to positive and negative angles. Online journalism has both advantages and limitations. This is due to the peculiar features of online medium:

- ➢ Online journalism is noted for its immediacy. News or other information gets circulated around the globe in seconds. Additional information gets incorporated easily at any time. Immediacy is its outstanding and useful feature.
- ➢ The characteristic of online medium has more advantages. Multimedia elements make news websites attractive. Hyperlinks, blogs and discussion forums allow web-users a more hands on experience, allowing them to be participants in the news process (Millison, 2004). The archiving ability of news websites is also a great advantage as it provides an extensive research resource to the public.
- ➢ Online journalism reflects changes in society as well as in technology. The number of people who access the WWW increases day by day. People get up-to-date on news, views and access entertainment content as online journalism allows easy access, anytime, anywhere. Online information can be accessed at any time it is a convenient way for people to stay up- to-date on local, national and world news.

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Principles of Online Reporting

There are some basic rules pertaining to this online journalism especially from a journalist's point of view while reporting online. The media has emerged up for the busy people mostly, and for its global reach just with the help of a click.

While reporting online, an online reporter should abide by the following rules:

➢ The news story should be crisp and precise if it has to sustain the browser's attention. A story that runs into two or more screens is not likely to hold readers attention for long. Word count continues to be an important yardstick here. The internet reporter must keep this fact in mind while writing the story. He must ensure that it runs across the minimum number of screens in the format chosen by the site editors.

➢ The Internet reporter must adopt the inverted pyramid format as a rational storytelling format. The most crucial point is hosted, right on top of the story, the less important points follow. This saves the user the need to plough through to the last paragraph to find out what happened. The information is available in the first few paragraphs; with facts arranged in their decreasing order of importance.

➢ The story must be updated as it breaks. The reporter cannot sit back and wait for events to unfold.

➢ The reporters writing for web media must learn to write short sentences using simple, common, everyday words that a browser will have no difficulty in understanding. Paragraphs should be short. Long paragraphs create fatigue and push browsers to reach for the mouse.

➢ The Internet reporter must develop the ability to break a story into short, fascinating side stories. The side stories enhance browser's interest, and give more hits and clicks for the site.

➢ The net journalist must go through log reports carefully. He must understand which stories are being read on the net. This will help him work on stories that are likely to be read more. Successful sites are those that share browser behavior with their staff members.

The web journalist must understand that a mistake, even if it is corrected after it is omnipresent on the site, does not offer much comfort to the individual or the company that has already suffered loss of face on account of the error. A mistake will be deemed as a blunder in case of incorrect information.

Challenges

Timeliness and convenience have become extremely important based on fast-paced society today. Busier and more unpredictable schedules call for more flexible ways to receive news. Usually shorter stories online are preferred.

CONCLUSION

➢ WWW brought in the reality of web journalism in the middle of the nineties. In the mid 1990s, web journalism was possible with advent of www. The previous establishment of a global communication networking and infrastructure and the introduction of the personal computer in homes throughout the world, helped to popularize the Internet and made it easy to use globally (Curran and Seaton, 2003). Today, all print and broadcast news media have made the transition to cyberspace and this attraction of online users requiring news has created online journalism (Dimitrova and Neznanski, 2006). Online journalism is one the outcomes of the revolution made possible by the internet. It is estimated that everyday millions of online users read their daily news on the Internet (Salwen *et al*., 2005). Since the 1990s, access to the Internet by the public has affected every social, political, economic, cultural, psychological, religious, and philosophical realms of society.

Another expected change to online journalism is that the medium have a great personal touch for individual users (Millison, 2004). One such way to make online journalism more personal is further incorporation of blogs. This would allow more interaction between readers and provide immediate

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commentary on news events and other issues (Froomkin, 2004).

There may be increased focus on monitoring web traffic to gauge the types of information web-users are seeking. This would make the medium more personal and audience specific, although it does have some privacy ramifications. There are many different attitudes regarding the challenges of the future and the progress online journalism will make. While the future is not completely clear, it is certain that the medium will continue to grow and prosper as technology improves and the medium is further understood and embraced.

Discussion

1. Online journalism has got maximum users from young people. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have brought real time media. It connects the users very fast and people share their views on these social media. This has the tendency to bring people to a common platform on many serious national issues.

2. The fact the Internet has allowed the audience to become active creators, rather than simply be passive consumers, of content is well documented. But with websites such as MySpace and YouTube, reader-generated content has become big business and also a social phenomenon.

3. All of these new platforms have opened new ways for us to get our journalism out and to start conversations with the public. A civil society depends on news, not just information. But there's a sense at many newspapers that we can get rid of reporters because we can get information from people off the streets for free.

4. Recently huge crowds could join Anna Hazare's movement against corruption and Delhi gang rape case. In Arab rise, it is observed that the social media played a key role. Young mass could unite in the national and international issues. Online journalism has huge opportunities for country like India where more than 70% population are youth.

5. The websites of established news organizations provided a particular framing for user- generated content, but such material was also being uploaded to Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube.

6. Online journalism can connect the people instantly and get their comments. Hence it can create a huge impact on any important issue. Most of the political parties would put their best effort to use this media for getting people views and support for their campaign. The Government can use this media to get people opinion on any policy and bills. This media would bring more accountability and transparency to the governance.

7. As the media is soft it can be easily manipulated. There should be strong policy and policing to any unethical online journalism. It can be wrongly used to bring private into the public domain and interfere with the private affairs where it should not be.

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