

An Assessment of the Agenda between New Media and Traditional Mainstream Mass Media

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Abstract – Social media and other online news sources, also known as the “new media”, have become an integral part of modern society. The presence of such new media, social media in particular, has threatened the existence of printed newspaper. The data indicate that a shift in consumer behavior has led more people to get their news and information online (New York Times, April 2009). However, the impact of the new media on print media is still manageable in India. This study aims to understand the impact of new media and print media on a representative subset of the Indian population.

The research involves a thorough survey methodology and presents expert interviews to identify the preferred media for reading News. It also quantifies the social changes triggered by the advent of new media and user generated content. Our studies show that the drop in circulation of print media can be attributed to the younger sect of the Indian population, which prefers the interactive nature of the new media and the reduced latency with which they can access news.

Mass media have always been constructing reality. Each media constructs different versions of reality which plays according to the tune of the media owners. With the rise of the new media, the reading public now has a different source of information about the existing realities. This study analyzes the different agendas of the new and traditional media. Four printed newspapers and four online newspapers were selected for this study. A content analysis of the different media was carried. The findings indicate that the different media projects different agenda. The constructed agenda reflect the prevailing philosophy the owners of these media.

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INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, fast developing technology has been fuelling an information revolution. The new media, digital broadcasting and the internet are sweeping away the limitations of the analogue world and weakening the grip of government-owned platforms. The nature of the relationship between the broadcaster and its audience is changing. New media in this information age provides an immediate, informative, intelligent, interactive platform for discussion and debate.

New media is essentially a cyber-culture with modern computer technology, digital data controlled by software and the latest fast developing communication technology. Most technologies described as “new media” are digital, and often have characteristics of being networkable, dense, compressible, interactive and impartial. Examples are the internet, websites, computer multimedia, games, CD-ROMs and DVDs. Young people are attracted to the easy means of getting information with internet based terminals or hand phones which provide them information of their choice anytime, anywhere. They need not have to wait

for any broadcasting schedule to be connected to get the information.

Internet blogs, news portals and online news, Facebook, You Tube, podcast and webcast, and even the short messaging system (SMS), are all new media. The modern revolution enables everybody to become a journalist at little cost and with global reach. Nothing like this has ever been possible before. The impact of new media has been noticed by governments in some developing countries where seats have been lost in the Senates and Parliaments due to the impact of the new media's uncensored, audience penetration and interactive tendencies.

For example, when the government depended on the mainstream media which it controlled to give information to the electorates, while the opposition used the new media which was uncensored, faster, cheaper and reached a bigger audience. Ironically it was the same government that had spent billions of dollars to foster the growth of the new media technology (Nagasvare & Krishnasamy, 2011).

However, it cannot be denied that the first media revolution was characterized by newsprint, while the second by radio, TV and internet, hence it is undeniable that the third media revolution, where professional media competes for attention alongside user-generated blogs, YouTube and Qik videos and Twitter, poses quite a conundrum (Silicon Republic Knowledge and Events Management Ltd, 2009).

The advent of New Communication Technology (NCT) has brought forth a set of opportunities and challenges for conventional media (Garrison, 1996). The presence of new media and the Internet in particular, has posed a challenge to conventional media, especially the printed newspaper (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Analysts in industrial organizations and businesses are of the view that the U.S. newspaper industry is suffering through what could be its worst financial crisis since the Great Depression (Barthelemy et al., 2011). Advertising revenues are tumbling due to the severe economic downturn, while readership habits are changing as consumers turn to the Internet for free news and information. Some major newspaper chains are burdened by heavy debt loads. As in the past, major newspapers have declared bankruptcy as several big city papers shut down, lay off reporters and editors, impose pay reductions, cut the size of the physical newspaper, or turn to Web-only publication (Kirchhoff, 2009).

The Social media and the online news have become the inherent part of modern society. The presence of new media and the Social media in particular, has posed a challenge to the printed newspaper. Readership habits seem to be changing as users turn to the Internet for free news and information. The alternate source of news and information is not only free but also acts fast. The 'instant' feature of the social media and the online news were one of the smart options for the consumers to accept it globally. Moreover, the ample amount of information and news provided by the internet which is updated every few minutes is never expected to be enjoyed by the newspaper that is received only once in a day. One can get back to the same new's or any piece of Information without any struggle of storing the stack of newspapers on a rack which soiled very much tiling. Alternatively, the Internet could be used at anytime and anywhere without taking long time to search for a piece of Information. Over a decade almost 90% of daily newspapers in US have been actively using online technologies to search for articles and most of them also create their own news websites to reach new markets.

Mass media have always been constructing reality. Each media constructs a particular different version of reality which may defer from societal realities. The constructed reality follows the version the media owners want to create. Thus, owners of traditional media such as newspaper, magazine, radio and television broadcast will be able to exert their influence the reporting of events by their respective media. They

literally decide what can or cannot be published or broadcasted. The hands of the owner, in the day to day running of the media organization, orchestrating the ways the news stories are reported can hardly be seen. The media managers that the owners appoint will undertake these duties routinely. These appointed media managers understand and execute policies according to the needs of the owners. In doing so, they thrust the chosen agenda to the media audience.

Before the advent of the Internet with all its converging technologies, traditional media are more likely to be successful in transmitting its agenda on the general public. The massive capital investment needed to set up traditional media limits the number and type of mass media that are made available to members of society. The growth of alternative traditional mass media is further limited in developing countries due to the restrictive regulations. Various permits and licenses are needed before any new mass media can start doing business.

The convergent of the various computer, broadcast and telecommunication technologies that gave rise to the Internet have changed the media landscape. The Internet enables new startup companies with limited capital to create and setup their own online newspaper and offer these new products to the general public.

The Internet has given rise to a host of new mass media. One of the most important developments that have a powerful effect on the way newspaper publishers do their business is blog. Blog, initially, started off as an online diary written by individual as a mean to share their stories with their close friends. Today, blog has evolved into a discussion or informational site that allows visitors to comment and even message each other.

The rise of blogs has redefined the term news and the way media organizations operate. Bloggers who publish news stories will do so with their opinion clearly stated in every posting. They are doing this without any reservations and they make their stand on any particular issue openly for everyone to read. The strength of blogs is the high level of interaction between readers and bloggers. Readers either agree or disagree with the published subject matter and they are allowed to post their comments on the chosen issue for all to see. The high level of interactivity between the bloggers and their readers is a new phenomenon that has never been seen since the advent of the printed media. Thus readers of blogs not only read the posting by the blogger but also the thread of discussion offered by other readers for a particular issue. Readers are attracted to these blogs because of the perceived credibility of the bloggers and alternative viewpoints on a particular issue. Readers of blogs do not have to pay to read any entry in these blogs. This adds to the attractiveness of blogs to the general public.

These constructed online agenda which are promoted in blogs and online newspapers are competing with the constructed agenda of the offline news media. The general reading publics are now given not one but a myriad sources of information about the existing realities. They are spoilt with numerous sources of information.

This study compares the agendas of the mainstream media to that of the agenda of the new media such as online newspapers and blogs. The constructed agenda published online is termed in this paper as the alternative agenda. Does the alternative agenda differ from agenda of mainstream offline newspapers? Are there any similarities between the agenda of the offline with the online media? This is the basic premise of this exploratory paper. By doing so, we are evaluating the contribution of the new media agenda for the purpose of reformulating the agenda setting theory. This is necessary because the original agenda setting theory as formulated by McCombs and Shaw is grounded on the constructed agenda of traditional media.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study on mass media has grown in leaps and bounds ever since McCombs and Shaw's (1993) formulation of agenda-setting function of the mass media (Rogers et al 1993). Many inputs towards the formulation of the theory have been contributed by scholars (see Broerse et al. 2010). Studies done have shown the relationship between media agenda and public relations agenda, media agenda and public policy, media agenda and international policy and presidential election (Kioussis & Shields 2008).

What are the similarities between all these studies? These studies look at the agenda offered by traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television. Thus there is a need to analyze and compared the agendas promoted in offline and online media.

Literature Review: The New Media is essentially an amalgamation of most media forms existing anywhere in the world today. It is a roaring example for the democratization of publishing as well as distribution. A virtue of the New Media is in its 'archives' content, that can be instantly accessed by the information needy, hence giving the seeker a sense of security. Though it is old information that the seeker avails, it gives a sense to every user that the media is of his/her own tune, thus asynchronous nature vanishes. The New Media is highly interactive. New Media has the potential to be a good mediator between the governors and the governed. There are numerous instances of it being a help to better the local self-governance. There are limitations like the espionage, wiki-leaks, etc. But traditional newspapers also favor political biases (paid news) and its credibility is becoming low day by day, while the trust of information on New Media is on the rise. Even government websites are on and rising. (Dr.B.K.Ravi, 2011)

Apparently, the proliferation of new communication technologies over the last few decades has increased audiences' activities by offering more choices and greater control over the communication process that is virtually unobtainable with the traditional media of communication.

Hence, audiences of the mass media today are enveloped in what McLuhan (1962) referred to as "new uncertainties" owing to changes in patterns of production, distribution, and consumption of media messages. It is then imperative to increase focus towards the audience to appraise the effect of these new alterations in their media consumption pattern. Lee and Delli Carpini (2010) further argued from the audience consumption perspectives thus:

"In speculating about the future and impact of journalism, as well as the nature of the Internet, it is important to examine both institutional (i.e. news production and distribution) and individual (i.e. news consumption habits or patterns) changes that come with digitization".

This alteration in communication patterns as previously pointed out, has given rise to the displacement and replacement effects debate of new media as observed in studies in some advanced countries of the world.

For most, the new media is seen as providing breaking news and additional information that may not be covered by the traditional media. While the traditional media still dominate as the major and credible source of information. All these relatively affect audience consumption pattern in Nigeria as in other developing societies. We also argue as pointed out by scholars elsewhere that each medium serves its audiences in different manner within different contexts and that the audiences since they are active users usually select particular medium that best gratifies particular need. Therefore media use pattern by audiences could be affected by these variables resulting in a situation quite different from what we see in developed societies.

THE NEW MEDIA AND ITS EVOLUTION

The print media which was always a one-way mass communication has given way for the new media to flourish which allows the people to act as both the transmitters as well as the Producers. The new media in this study refers to the online news like the Hindu, NDTV, India today and Tunes of India, social media like Facebook and twitter. The new media seem to be giving solutions for every need possible. Right from the humble beginning to the present, the new media is been a vast preference for the flexible features it provides.

THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA

The print media paradigm flourished in the pre-internet era where instant access to news, using smartphones and online news aggregators, was not within the reach of the common man. The dynamics of information access has significantly changed over the years, with the number of smartphone users in India alone has exceeding 20 million. Trying to deliver news to the current generation of tech-savvy Indian population seems to be redundant as the process involves a lot of steps and is passive in comparison to new media which is instant and interactive. As per the statistics by Capstone report in the year 2011. the print circulation has been declining over the past few years.

The breadth of information available online and the opportunity to personalize news consumption according to individual interests, coupled with being able to get news updates several times a day pushed audiences online for their news. Furthermore, social media allows users to provide feedback, which in turn is used to enrich the user's experience. The newspapers do deserve some credit as they do a better job in covering local interest stories, which are often neglected by the politically and nationally minded online publications. If one can get past the main section of The Star without having a seizure, one would like to read its Metro section which keeps one informed on the little things going on in the neighborhood, city and state. (Yap, 2009).

The Online media sources often sustain using revenues from advertisements and sponsored news articles. This lucrative business model that has proven to be more profitable than the print-based counterpart has started to affect the scale at which print media gets adopted. The main aim of our research is to examine the effect of the social media and other online news sources on traditional print media. This paper will also study the impact of print media and new media on the population. There is a gradual increase in the circulation of daily in India with the TOI having an increase of 20.5% from 2010 to 2011 but whereas The Hindu has showed a decrease of 1.01% in 2011. But however the Average of print media circulation is chopping down globally, the need for the impact created over the new media is to be studied and the results would be helpful for the future of traditional media.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher adopted the survey method and expert interview to identify the preferred media for reading News and to measure the social changes due to New Media and Traditional Media and also to determine the effect of user generated contents.

Tools for Data Collection: The primary data was collected by a questionnaire and structured interview was conducted with experts. The findings and conclusions have been drawn based on the survey

results and the expertise view on the topic. Who have the habit of reading news either online or in print and are of age groups between 20 and 60. Using stratified selected sampling method, 384 samples were selected and surveyed. The sample size was calculated using an application called the sample size calculator which runs on a formula. To operate the formula, it is mandatory to know the total population in figures. In this the total population that was calculated to be is 3.17 million. The formula has three parameters:

Z - Confidence level (95%)

P - Population size (3.17 Million)

C - Confidence interval (5 %)

The field that is preferred or best suited to target all the age groups who would read news and also has access to internet are the ones who work in the Bank sector, College students, IT Sector, Reporters, House wives and retired people.

Expert Interviews: The experts in the field of Print media and new media is targeted and interviewed, in this research to understand the scope of user-generated news and the social changes due to the new media and the traditional media, the followings experts were interviewed.

RESULTS

The consumption of the new media and Newspaper are noted down to understand the preferred media among the population for reading news. It is found that 4.4% of the population is subscribed to newspaper alone whereas 23.60% is subscribed to Internet alone and 58.20% is subscribed to both the media and it is also to be noted that 8.8% of the population is not subscribed to both. Below is the table that contains the preference and media on use for the 8.8% of the population who are not subscribed to both. Of the 8.8% of the population who is not subscribed to both, 13.63% uses and prefers newspaper whereas 9.09% of the population uses newspaper but prefers online. Also, 9.09% of the population uses online prefers newspaper whereas 54.54% both uses and prefers online. It is also analyzed from the above graph is that the percentage of the population who is accessed to print actually prefers online which means that preference might change into usage anytime. The percentage of population on their usage and preference on different media for reading news who are subscribed to at least either of the media.

CONCLUSION

The convenient access to online news for free seems to be little reason to pay for a newspaper subscription. The witness of not the "End" of print but rather the adaptation of print and News organizations to rapidly changing consumer patterns and a corresponding

shift towards digital content has brought the new media to create its impact on the society at a faster pace.

The news models are in transition, moving away from old concepts while embracing new models of transmitting information. News in the past set the time; you could recognise news by the way news articles always referred to a time and place. Now the news narrative has changed, as references to time have become obsolete when reporting to a global audience. With the temporality aspect lost old monopolies have also been broken up by the new media. One no longer has to wait until the 9 o'clock news. News is all the time; there is no time without news.

The fact that we are increasingly living in an era of media convergence, distinctions among traditional mainstream mass media and the new media such as the Internet are getting more and more blurred. Despite these distinctions, there are still complementarities between the new media and conventional media. They will continue to coexist and reinforce each other particularly in Malaysia and other developing countries.

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