

Social Media and Professional Development: A Study Among Journalists In J&K

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Abstract

Living in times when both professional and personal are all coming together on one platform, with the growing number of social media platforms, journalists, too, are assumed to be using social media platforms for both professional and personal use. Research in the past suggest that professional identity on social media is formed out of four things- subject expert, social media guidelines by organization, freedom and spontaneity. The aim of this study is to dig deep into journalists' use of social media platforms, more specifically, to build their professional identity by interviewing selected journalists from J&K. This research helps in gaining more perspectives of journalists from both public and private media on the subject through qualitative interviews. The results of the study indicate that most journalists use only one or two social media platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter followed by other platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Social networking sites attract professional journalists from across the globe and with the growing demand for mobile news content, engagement between journalists and their international reader is also on the rise. Considering this expansion, a journalist could be benefitted by presenting his/her identity in a way that is more truthful to help serve their profession and themselves better. Results also show that journalists are careful while sharing both content and identity on social media platforms as compared to users with no journalism background and feel that social media has made their job more difficult and challenging.

Keywords: *Social media, New media Ecology, Social Identity, Professional Identity, Professional Development, Objectivity, Journalists, J&K*

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Introduction

A few years ago social media was just another platform for youngsters to stay connected and it was used mostly for personal purposes but as per the recent reports it is seen that there is a growing acceptance of social media worldwide (3.80 billion social media users). As per Statista 2019, there is a significant increase in social network users in India and it is expected to have around 448 million social network users in 2021. Interactive features of social media are transforming journalism into a platform used to exchange views. Journalists, too, are found using social media platforms to network, generate story ideas and expand their reach. With the expansion of social media, journalists are also seen making their presence on different social media platforms for both personal and professional purposes. But with the coming of both personal and professional together on one platform journalists are often wondering what to share and how much to share on social media platforms. Based upon news values and journalistic principles, news agencies abroad have specified social media guidelines for its employees and journalists. Associated Press for instance, in their social media guidelines for journalists has clear instructions for them to identify themselves as AP reporters, use a profile photograph and restrain posting political views on any public forum.

The aim of this research is to thus understand social media routines, its specific uses by journalists and the way it has changed their work culture by conducting interviews of selected journalists from J&K. To get valid conclusions on the subject, both practical and theoretical methods were used. Research questions helped in finding out overall perception of journalists on this transformation. Besides, studies in the past on the subject helped in setting the foundation for results and discussion.

Problem Statement

Literature suggests social media is a platform where each and every voice gets heard. Journalists both professional and non-professional find an easy access to get in touch with such voices. In the new media ecology nothing is fixed, neither the journalistic products nor even their resource. Anyone can aggregate content and then publish material, thus making it difficult to define and confine the role played by a professional journalist and the traditional obligations they have towards the general public. This draws attention towards reconfiguring the defined roles based on traditional news values, connections and relationships. According to Cook (2013) a journalist defined by connections and networks can thus occupy more space in new media ecology. Social identity of a journalist in contemporary journalism, however, is a critical problem according to Kreiss (2018) due to the very nature of a journalist's ability to question

the authority. Earlier studies show that it is difficult for journalists to be successful and credible on social media if one separates one's professional and private content.

Objectives

1. To study social media habits and routines of journalists.
2. To find out professional and personal use of social media platforms by journalists in J&K.
3. To examine the extent of social media influence on journalists' work culture.

Significance of the Study

In the present century most people have an online presence experienced in terms of what they choose to share about themselves with others socially. This social process of human-Internet, in present times is seen within the space of social media communication. Tewksbury & Rittenberg (2012) in their study on news on internet conclude that there is a change in the relationship between people and information from top-down media system to horizontal interaction between people and news. According to them with private citizens contributing online content by way of opinions, images etc, the information flow is shifting from a few to many and thus what we are experiencing is information democratization.

Social networking sites attract professional journalists from across the globe and with the growing demand for mobile news content, engagement between journalists and their international reader is also on the rise. Johnson & Wiedenbeck (2009), however, feel that credibility of information on social media increases with writers' information and hyperlink. Considering the long-term value for social media and growing number of young users of social media, journalists must continue to respond to them, suggests Contrera (2016) as computer mediated communication may help individuals including journalists to present their identity in a way that seeks to be truthful.

Review of Literature

Computer mediated communication in general addresses identity formation, presentation, distribution etc. Studies in the past suggest that professional identity of a journalist is based on four pillars – expertise (when a journalist share on social media something connected to his field of expertise), guidelines (employer guidelines forbids insulting fellow colleagues and their work on social media platforms), freedom (journalists behave on social media as per the guidelines) and spontaneity (journalists using social media out of their own initiative and curiosity). This paper aims to understand social identification and professional development through the perspectives of journalists in J&K.

Theories of social and professional identity

Social identity theory as proposed by psychologist Henri Tajfel in 1979 simply means “a person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)”. According to him we see the world into two prejudiced social groups and called it “them” and “us”. He proposed that there is a cognition process and particular order in evaluating others. Evaluating others can be divided into three main categories – social categorization, social identification and social comparison. Once we identify ourselves with a group and categorize ourselves as part of that group we then tend to compare that group with other groups.

Kresis (2018) in his essay on social identity of journalists positions journalists as a high status social group and argues that social identity has considerable consequences for institution’s authority. Journalists are expected to adapt to event-driven professional journalism in the process they start writing differently from what they grew up with.

According to sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) “search for self-identity is a modern problem having its origin in Western individualism.” Whereas according to another sociologist Erving Goffman (1990), “An individual when surrounded by others tries to control his impression in many ways.” He called it a front stage and backstage performance which cannot be same in both places and said that it can be seen everywhere in the society as well.

Much before the social media platforms became a part of a day-to-day life Deuze (2005) studied the changes in professional identity of journalists and linked them to the concept of ideology. According to him ideology binds the pieces of identity together. Ideology comprises traits and values which are challenged by the changes in newsroom as well as society.

In his attempt to study professional identity of travel journalists, Pirolli (2017) interviewed travel journalists and bloggers and identified that travel journalists differ from bloggers mainly for two reasons – travel journalists are paid for their work while bloggers may not necessarily be paid and travel journalists undergo some professional training as well.

Pradhan & Kumari (2018) (Lewis & Molyneux, 2019) explored uses of social media tools for different journalistic functions, and found that Indian journalists are using social media for both professional and personal uses. Twitter was used mostly for professional purposes followed by Facebook and for personal use journalists used Facebook followed by WhatsApp mainly to access information and build relationships. The study found Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter to be the most used social media platforms among Indian journalists. Professional Social Networking Sites like LinkedIn, Flickr are not very popular among journalists in India as per the study.

In a similar attempt to find out whether social media technologies are interfering or leading to professional advancement of journalists, Pathak (2018) concluded that social media is

reshaping journalism. It is helping journalists in updating people on recent developments in a news story and journalists too are positively adapting to the change.

Lewis & Molyneux (2019) however raised question on the net positive impact of social media on journalism and urged to challenge the general assumption of social media research which is assumed to bring benefit for journalists and journalism as a whole by shifting focus on social media interactions that are specifically causing harassment for journalists in the West.

Mukherjee (2016) examined the perspectives of journalists on effects of social media on their profession and concluded that with the spread of technology more participation will be seen on social media and people will aspire to be citizen journalists. Due to growing competition, we can get more objective news and use of social media will not be as much of a threat to TV channels as it could be for the print media.

Research Methodology

To study the use of social media platforms by journalists for professional identity and understand their perspective regarding objectivity on social media, journalists from J&K were interviewed using email interviews. According to Morse (2012), semi-structured interviews could be conducted in-person, via an e-mail or by using internet survey. The journalists chosen for qualitative interview were from both print and electronic media and from both the fields of reporting and editing. Email-interview questions were sent to 15 journalists, out of which only 10 journalists responded. Interviewees are quoted anonymously to bring out more open and honest views. A total of seven research questions were asked and some of the important questions included:

1. Is social media a part of your public life, private life or both?
2. Has social media changed your work?
3. Do you follow any social media routine?
4. What is the relevance of objectivity on social media?
5. Do you think about your role as journalist when using social media?

Results of the Study

There are many mainstream journalists who are active users of social media too. Few of them who have been interviewed are:

“Social media is propaganda machinery. I want to give people real news and not get swayed by the propaganda, which some organizations do, in order to achieve their hidden agenda.”

Participant (P1): Age (39) works with JK News Today as special correspondent. Earlier, he worked as senior correspondent with The Tribune, Jammu edition. He frequently uses Facebook and Twitter and finds both of them equally important. He uses Facebook for friends

and Twitter to know what is happening around the world. Besides, he also uses other platforms to experience change.

When asked if social media was a part of his public or private life or both? He answered both public and private and used mostly to share news. Apart from news, he also used these platforms to share poems and interesting quotes. Social media, according to him, has brought out some changes in his work like finding ideas, saving time etc. But at the same time it has increased the uncertainty. Chances of fake news and propaganda are more on social media. One can't rely on anything on social media. Being from print media, I want to recheck things before sharing it.

“Objectivity on social media is under lens. There are many concerns and apprehensions among general masses.”

Participant (P2): A 40 year-old freelancer from Jammu uses Twitter, Facebook, Instagram to keep myself updated with current affairs and other things happening around the world. He agreed that each social media platform has its own significance and with the changing times and technology, according to him one must explore new modes of information to stay connected.

Social media has become part of his both public life as well as private life as he felt that they both are inter-connected. He normally uses social media to share his stories but also prefers to post anything random that comes to his mind. Although social media helps in finding story ideas and save time on a routine basis, he strongly feels that social media has made the job of journalists rather more difficult and challenging. When asked his views on objectivity on social media he had his doubts and wrote there is seldom fact-check on social media. But as far his role as journalist on social media is concerned he felt even more responsible to keep the facts right.

“Role of a Journalist is always very important and of great responsibility when on social media. I feel while undergoing the course, study or training of Journalism, a person automatically develops the sense of responsibility towards do's and don'ts in this regard.”

Participant (P3): 50 years-old, news reader from All India Radio, Jammu, used WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter for official as well as personal use due to their quick access and video reach. Although WhatsApp and Twitter are the most important social media platform for him and he has accepted them as a part of his both public as well as private life. Besides sharing personal events and ideas, he uses social media to share news and programs prepared and broadcast by his news unit. He, too, agreed that social media helps in finding news story ideas and saves time. Though he does not follow any social media routine but spends certain time of

the day using social media platforms. He feels it is not always possible to maintain objectivity on social media. People with bad intentions will anyway do things they are not supposed to.

Participant (P4): A 45-year old Principal Correspondent from Dainik Jagran newspaper, Jammu, feels “As a journalist whenever I share anything on social media I always try to be more responsible because my readers trust my reporting. If I also join the fake racket, it will not good for the society and journalism.”

When asked regarding the social media platforms being used by him, although he follows no social media routines, generally used Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter as all these platforms helped him in his professional life and considered Facebook and Whatsapp as the most important ones. He also agreed that he get a lot of news story ideas from social media and also agreed that social media has become part of his public as well as private life. He mostly used social media platforms to share all his news stories. Besides, he also used social media to share his photographs and general quotes. When asked his views regarding objectivity being the most important thing in journalism, he replied that there is no control on social media and without proper guidelines one cannot expect objectivity.

“I try to keep a consistent image as a journalist while using social media for both professional and personal use.”

Participant (P5): Age (25) female Correspondent from The News Now uses Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp for building relations with friends, sharing and receiving information and also to educate her on various issues. She finds all the social media platforms important and unique in their way. She agreed social media has become a part of her both public life as well as private life. She shares all the stories covered by her on her social media platforms and then tag all the concerned people and relevant organizations to the story. Besides work, she also shares her personal photographs. Though she does not follow any particular social media routine, still feels that social media greatly helped her in increasing the reach of her content, reaching out to relevant people and finding new ideas for content creation. To a question on objectivity on social media she said that one can try to be objective but some people in a bid to get followers or enhance their reach post something which is not ‘objective’. Besides, she keeps her image consistent as a journalist when posting something on social media.

Conclusion

The information gathered through the qualitative interviews provided interesting facts to discuss and address research questions. Most interviewees used only one or two social media platforms, mainly Facebook and Twitter followed by other platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Journalists pointed a few reasons for not using more social media platforms out of

them the most important ones were lack of time and uncertain nature of the platform itself. The findings of this study are similar to the studies conducted on the similar subject in the past. For instance, it was seen through this study that for work and leisure, some journalists have separate platforms, while others do not. Most of them also agreed that authenticity is lacking on social media, they don't have a particular social media routine but use social media often during a day. Results of this study, however, differ from the study conducted by Turtola where the researcher found the existence of some tension between public and private life on social media of journalists. The results of this study indicate that there seems to be a coming together of both professional and personal usage of social media platforms. However, journalists are being careful while sharing both content and identity on social media platforms as compared to other users who may not be from journalism background. The respondents of this study feel that objectivity can be maintained on social media provided a journalist acts responsibly. However, most of them cautioned that fake news and propaganda are more on social media and that one can't rely on information received through social media. Though it appears that social media platforms are here to stay, journalists must decide about which platform works well for them in terms of both professional networking and casual engagement with audience and thus make informed choices of such platforms to benefit their work. As suggested by Deuze (2005) who linked professional identity of journalists with the concept of ideology and concluded that ideology binds identity together. The responsibility thus comes even more on the media organisations to train their reporters and sub-editors to achieve a balance in their work based on traditional news values which will help them build a strong professional identity and thus reflect the same on social media platforms to win trust and get recognition in their field. Kresis (2018) too has suggested that social identity affects institution's authority in the eyes of its publics. The findings of this study however can't be generalized. Future studies can be done to generalize the trend and study the initiatives taken by media organizations to bring balance in professional and personal identity of journalists.

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