

# An era of Change and Collaboration: Effect of Social Media on News Production

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## Abstract

The internet has transformed the manner in which news is collected, presented, and distributed. Social media encompasses a variety of online forums where users can interact with one another. When compared to traditional forms of media, social media stands out since users can create and share the content themselves. Today, online news is not merely about publishing a story on the internet by trained professionals. It marks a restructuring and reimagining of the association that exists between reporters and the audience. This study attempts to understand the changing nature of this relationship by interviewing journalists in Bengaluru, India. It is seen that contemporary newsrooms are migrating from a paradigm monopolized by traditional media practices to a more multifaceted news production process that integrates audiences. As empowering as the internet ostensibly is for social media users, they must also combat fake news and break out of their filter bubbles.

**Keywords :** Fake news; Filter bubbles; News production; Producers; Social media.

## Introduction

### An Overview

The internet is a medium that has transformed communication by bridging geographical barriers and removing constraints imposed by time and space. It is the manifestation of Marshall McLuhan's concept of the global village, in which the entire world has been connected with the help of an electronic nervous system. The internet has allowed the instantaneous transfer of information from one part of the world to another (McLuhan 278).

A vast array of information is available on the Internet regarding any topic. The participatory nature of the internet has led to the decentralization of information and democratization of knowledge (Kahin and Keller 5). Many scholars note that computer-mediated communications have increased the capabilities for information and interaction in incredible ways (Papacharissi and Rubin 175). In a matter of decades, the internet has transformed from being a technological novelty to a necessity. It now connects more than half the world's population, and has reached the parts of the earth where basic essentials, such as clean water, have not (Sagan and Leighton 119).

The internet has veritably permeated all aspects of life. It is used for educational reasons, to make business transactions, for entertainment, personal uses, and a plethora of other purposes. The internet is also a powerful platform for news. Its omniscience and accessibility offers an immediacy of information that no traditional medium can match. This has consequently sped up the process of news creation, as news organizations race to be ahead of each other as well as the demands of their audiences (Sagan and Leighton 120).

Correspondingly, the manner in which audiences consume news has also changed. No longer are readers confined to their morning papers, or viewers restricted to the nightly news broadcasts; audiences consume news content based on their convenience. Additionally, news has become personalized and participatory. Audiences understand news by choosing from a variety of sources. They assist in the selection, filtering, distribution of news by sharing it on social networks. Their activities contour the discourse and coverage of the news (Sagan and Leighton 125).

## **Web 2.0**

When the internet first became accessible to the public, users logged on to look for information and updates. The webpages were static in nature and the process of communication followed mostly the top-down model. The creator of the World Wide Web, Tim-Berners Lee, refers to this as the "read-only" iteration of the web (Techopedia). Although basic text-based chats and bulletin boards existed, there were not many avenues for large scale interaction or content creation. This period of the web which lasted from 1990 to 2004 is referred to as Web 1.0.

Web 2.0 refers to the version of the internet that came into existence around 2005. Tim O'Rilley, the owner of a publishing house who coined

the phrase Web 2.0, referred to it as the “second coming of the web” (Fuchs 29) and presented it as something that was ostensibly different from its predecessor, having both democratic and economic possibilities. It is known as the “read/write” version of the internet (Techopedia). Its defining characteristics are that it acknowledged users as a cumulative source of intelligence seen in collaborative platforms like Amazon, Craigslist, Google, and Wikipedia, where there are communities of interconnected users. There is also a decentralization of information, underlying trust, large scale participation, enhanced user interfaces, repurposing of data, and the rise of social media.

## **Social Media**

Social media is a term that encompasses different digital platforms that allow people to communicate with each other using text, visuals, and sound. The distinguishing feature of social media when compared to other media, is that the content is created by users themselves (Bergström and Belfrage 584). Fuchs (35) argues that for a platform to qualify as social media, it must encompass the following aspects - information, communication, collaboration, and community. In the first decade of the new millennium, the term social media gained currency with sites like Facebook, YouTube, Myspace, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Instagram among others, gaining users worldwide.

## **Internet and Social Media-usage in India**

In India, around 624 million people access the internet with the internet penetration rate around 45% (Newman et al). Over 82 percent of respondents in India indicated that the internet was their primary source of news, compared to only 50 percent who said that they used newspapers as a news source. The accelerated growth and adoption of smartphone and internet technologies have made digital news a significant force to be reckoned with in Indian media industry. Among urban, lettered, and younger audiences, news was also consumed predominantly on social media. Out of the over 600 million internet users in the country, nearly 50 percent were daily active users of the medium. The consumption of online news in 2020 grew by 16 percent, compared to the previous year (Statista).

The number of social media users in India is around 448 million (32.3 % of the population). Affordable data plans and inexpensive devices were the major factors that drove users who accessed the internet on mobile phones (Newman et al). The most widely used social media platform in

India is YouTube, with a whopping 85.8% percent penetration rate. This is followed by Facebook (75.5%) and WhatsApp (74.6%). India has the most number of Facebook users in the world with over 330 million users. The other most popular social networking sites in India are Instagram with (70.6%), and Twitter with (50.5%) (Statista).

### **News Production: A Conceptual Framework**

News production is defined as a process of reporting something news-worthy, executed by members belonging to “journalistic subcultures” such as reporters, editors, designers, technical staff, and managerial staff (Hanitzsch and Hoxha 3). Domingo as cited in Hanitzsch and Hoxha (3), identifies news production as a procedure that involves the following phases – access and observation, selection and filtering, processing and editing, distribution, and interpretation.

With the arrival of the internet, there has been a seismic shift in the news production process. The most profound of these changes is the transformation of journalistic labor, which now increasingly takes place outside the newsroom and on social media platforms. Social media becomes an integral newsgathering tool in order to assess top news trends, to obtain content and sources, research stories, and obtain community perspectives.

Additionally, Hanitzsch and Hoxha (3) note that story ideation, story narration, and story presentation, which are key components of news production in traditional media like newspapers and television, have undergone changes with the coming of new media. Journalists must now incorporate social media content for newspapers and television channels. They must also customize news content to meet the needs and demands of social media users.

- (i) Story ideation is defined as the catalyst by which a news story comes into existence. An idea for a story can be initiated by a journalist based on their observation or by them conducting research into a subject. The impetus for a story could come from the reporter themselves. This is known as the proactive method. Another source of a story idea could be from outside the newsroom. Reporters may attend a press conference, read press releases, or be given confidential information from stakeholders for investigative pieces. This is known as the reactive method.

In some cases, journalists might get a story idea by looking at

news items being covered by competing news organizations. The issue might already have media attention, and the journalist adds to the coverage. This is known as the follow up method. At times, a story could be led by an event. In these situations, the journalist does not have an option but to cover the story by being on the field where the occurrence has transpired. This is called the on the ground method.

- (ii) Story narration is the way in which the structure of a news story evolves and is constructed. Here, the journalist focuses on how to convey the story to the audience. There are three crucial components that go into story narration – the overarching narrative (the account of events), the angle of the story (the point of view from which the story is told), and the framing of the story (the interpretative framework within which the story is placed).
- (iii) Story presentation occurs as the third sequential step in the order of how a news story comes into being. Once the story idea and narrative structure have been finalized, the journalist and other news producers within the organization, work on shaping the facets of how the story is covered. They decide on what aspects of the story should be conveyed as fact, which sources and excerpts from sound bites to choose, and which parts of the story to leave out. A few aspects of the story might be given more importance than others.

The cycle of news production does not culminate once a story has been presented. It continues with the circulation and distribution of the story, its delivery to the audience, the reception of feedback, and the subsequent re-shaping of the story idea. News production is also not a linear process, and sometimes, as new facts emerge or the situation develops, the narrative and story structure may also change.

### **From Gatekeeping to Gatewatching**

Gatekeeping theory is considered to be one of the cornerstones of the mass communication process. It explains how news is sifted and selected for publishing and distribution. It takes place at all junctures of the media organizational hierarchy – from the journalist who finds a story and reports it, to the editors who decide which stories should be covered and which left out. These choices occur on a daily basis in newsrooms which identify the items that audiences will encounter and consume (Erzikova 2).

The term gatekeeping was first proposed by German scholar Kurt Lewin who applied it in the realm of psychology. He studied how American homemakers were “gates” or key players in determining what their family eats and what items enter their food “channels”. There could be external forces that could influence these decisions. Lewin noted that the concept of gatekeeping went beyond the food choices of a family or community and could be applied to information channels as well.

It was David Manning White who utilized the theory in the sphere of news production. He observed and interacted with the wire editor of a local news publication, whom he referred to as Mr Gates. White found that 90% of the wire stories that the newspaper received, never made it to print. He studied the news stories that were selected and contrasted it with those that were eliminated and identified various factors that impacted Mr Gate’s decision making. These included internal and external variables such as news values, subjective bias, political environment, cultural background, ethics, and personal beliefs (Al Maghlooth 56).

The continued appeal and relevance of gatekeeping theory lies in how it summarizes the multitude of causes that affect decision making in news organizations. With the arrival of the internet and other new media technologies, scholars have questioned its applicability in a highly digitized mediascape. Shoemaker and Vos renewed the gatekeeping model and added an important component – the audience. They explained that modern day gatekeeping which takes place in online spaces is not hierarchical, moving from sender to receiver, but rather, information is multidirectional and travels across multiple channels. In this media environment, contemporary gatekeepers do not just include reporters and editors, but the audience as well, who are key players in determining what information is newsworthy (Erzikova 2). This perspective considers each internet user as a potential gatekeeper who can disseminate and respond to news stories published by news organizations.

Bruns made a seminal contribution to the evolution of the gatekeeping theory. He noted that the process of gatekeeping had metamorphosized into gatewatching. Online, the proverbial gates of information had multiplied almost infinitely. Professional journalists and online audiences now watched the gates of trusted online sources and news organization. They collaborated to compose, compile, and redistribute news (Bruns 34). Publishing was not seen as the end of the news process. Instead, news became an incremental and ongoing effort, with online readers commenting, responding, and intensifying the understanding of an initial news story. The

ability to hyperlink content online allowed for an intertextual approach to news coverage, with one story linking to multiple other web pages. The burden of summarizing and reporting all aspects of a story did not lie with the journalist alone. The reader was considered as an equally important contributor.

### **Review of Literature**

The internet has created a fundamental shift in the way people perceive information – from the regimented and fixed nature of printed publications to a format that is fluid and amenable to take up various shapes. Viner explains this by saying that a newspaper or magazine is static and self-contained. Once it is printed, it is complete. On the contrary, online news is consistently refreshed, updated, improved, modified, and evolving. The possibilities with it are endless.

The internet has transformed the manner in which news is collected, presented, and distributed. Many scholars have reflected on how the news business has also changed as a result of this digital disruption. It is seen that globally, with notable exceptions like India, most countries have seen steady decline in newspaper circulation. Many media houses have ceased their print editions, in favor of being ‘digital only’ or ‘digital first’ organizations (Chandrasekhar 27).

Viner claims that online news publishing is not merely about uploading a story on the internet. It marks a restructuring and reimagining of the association that exists between the journalist and the audience. Reporters are no longer seen as omniscient and omnipresent, similarly, readers are not seen as passive receptacles for information who do not participate in the news process, except in tokenistic manners. These previously existing distinctions have started to diminish.

In some instances, a reader might be positioned to report a story better, due to proximity to an event or by being a stakeholder in the story. Due to the internet, audiences too have publishing power, and the ability to document and tell stories about the world around them. Rosen calls online readers the “people formerly known as the audiences” and Gillmore refers to them as “the former audience” (Viner). Online audiences do not just consume content, they interact with it by commenting, sharing, adding, and distributing it. They are constantly collaborating with the journalist.

Examining the Indonesian media ecosystem, Iskandar (4) points out that are a set of defining characteristics for internet driven journalism – the presence of 24/7 news outlets that post content round the clock, citizen journalism by online users who report about the world around them, and active involvement and interaction between media and citizen reporters.

However, unequivocal acceptance of the audience as a news contributor was not always the case. Hermida and Thurman (5) interviewed seasoned editors from prominent news portals in the United Kingdom. They found that media institutions were cautious about the publishing capabilities of online users. While media executives were creating more opportunities for user-generated content to be incorporated in professional reporting, there was an apparent reluctance in terms of ensuring trust and a there existed a prevailing fear of potential legal conundrums. There was a painful change in adopting citizen participation in daily news coverage and senior editors had a hard time renouncing the role of the gatekeeper.

The possibilities offered by the internet have fundamentally changed the way news is created and consumed. Everyday users are given the ability to pick and read exactly the kind of news they want. Before the arrival of the internet, one had to purchase the entire newspaper to access the sports pages. But now, one only had to go to the sports section of a news website, which had in-depth and dedicated information about sports. The internet also empowered users to post their own content. Previously, one had to own a newspaper or publishing house to get their point of view across to a large audience. Now, everyone has the tools to compose and upload their perspectives online.

The contemporary media landscape has witnessed the unprecedented rise of the insidious phenomenon of fake news. Although the nomenclature of the term is relatively new, its incidence has been exponential, and its ubiquity in the global news media, undeniable. Purposely misleading stories and intentionally malicious claims made through fake news threaten the democratic ideals of a well-informed electorate (Nyhan et al. 3).

A distinguishing feature of fake news is its disregard and undermining of the voices of authorities, experts, and established institutions. The notion of objectivity is sacrificed and false information is perpetuated, creating a biased and partisan discourse that prevents rational discussion (Baron and Crotoof as cited in Allcott and Gentzkow 750). Many scholars have investigated the ways in which fake news differs from slanted or biased media content. One major difference is that fake news does not make any



strides or attempts at accurate reporting. Latent beliefs are masqueraded as facts. Secondly, they also make no attempts to create a long-term reputation for themselves. Short-run profits from clicks outweigh long-term loyalty from readers.

Exploring the impact of fake news on reporting practices, Schapals (4) conducted in-depth interviews of British and Australian journalists. It was seen that the respondents revealed a growing concern about the propagation of fake news, particularly in an era of post truth, where facts were seen as secondary to one's personal opinion.

In an effort to provide a customized news experience for users, search engines, social media platforms, and news organizations construct algorithms that learn and recommend content based on user preferences. It is in this context that Pariser (50) proposes the idea of the filter bubble. It refers to a virtual space where each user only gets content that resonates with their respective worldviews. These digital cocoons help users surround themselves with news that aligns with their beliefs. Social media fortifies these echo chambers. For instance, platforms like Facebook and Instagram learn the preferences of their users, and continue to serve them similar content on their feeds. Users are given the tools to block or mute viewpoints from users and organizations they do not agree with. Contradictory views and ideas are hardly available for the user to see and this gives a false view to the user that only their perspectives are correct and the majority of other online users supporting it as well. The algorithms that underlie these platforms, become automated gatekeepers (Pariser 53).

It is seen that the world is migrating from a traditional news cycle monopolized by trained media professionals, to a more multifaceted information cycle that integrates ordinary people within the process. Our news environment and our news consumption habits are transforming tremendously. Legacy media, like newspapers and television, have started to appropriate aspects of new media and subsume to the standard practices in social media to remain relevant to the needs of audiences. This study attempts to understand the evolution of journalistic practices that is being witnessed by the media industry today.

Bruns (16) refers to the emerging practice of "produsage" online. He defines it as the collective and symbiotic development of news that occurs between journalists and their audiences. There is a negotiation of the news coverage which takes place. Hermida argues that after the advent of the internet, professional journalists and citizens now collectively share con-

trol of the news. Audiences online contribute to news in the collection, dissemination, and contextualization of events. News was always considered as an “ambient” phenomenon because of its ubiquitous nature, now the practice of journalism has become ambient too (Hermida). In the digital era, news has become omnipresent.

Digital environments have changed substantially since the emergence of the first online citizen journalism projects in the late 1990s. News is now a collaborative effort, where audiences both consume news and contribute to it, but adding additional levels of selection, filtering, interpretation, and distribution of news.

## **Methodology**

### **• Broad Objective**

This study seeks to investigate how social media has affected the process of news production among journalists in Bengaluru city. While research into this paradigm shift have been conducted abroad, there is a nascent scholarship pertaining to it in the Indian context. This study attempts to fill that research gap by considering Bengaluru city as a microcosm for these changes.

### **• Specific Objectives**

To find out the ways in which social media has affected news production practices among journalists.

To examine if the prevalence of filter bubbles affects the process of news production.

To examine how the proliferation of fake news has affected the process of news production.

### **• Research Method**

In order to investigate the objectives of the study, in-depth interviews with journalists from media organizations in Bengaluru city were conducted. In-depth interviews are a crucial qualitative research technique in which the researcher gathers the data directly from stakeholders on a one-on-one basis. This technique is always oriented towards a goal and is vital in gathering viewpoints, experiences, and beliefs of a population

under study. It provides a deep-rooted comprehension of various issues, concepts, or phenomena. After individual perspectives are collected, the answers are analyzed to learn of any recurring themes.

- **Study-tool**

An open-ended questionnaire was formulated in order to understand how the news gathering and news production process has changed as a result of social media. The semi-structured nature of the questionnaire offered the researchers some leeway to follow up on what the interviewees said.

The questions pertained to how social media has affected news production. The questions also sought to explore the consequences of filter bubbles and fake news on social media. Being in a filter bubble refers to a process of being mentally cordoned off from multiple viewpoints. This occurs as a consequence of personalized algorithms on social media sites that present content based on each user's preferences and online engagement history. Fake news is defined as information which is posted online with the objective to misinform or deceive the audience. The motivation behind fake news could be to gain monetary or political benefit. Fake news is verifiably false. It is a fictitious story that is made to look like a real news story in the way it is written and presented.

- **Sampling**

The participants for the study were contacted through snowball sampling method. This is a technique in which individuals are requested to suggest names of others who could be possible subjects in the study. In-depth interviews of 10 journalists working in newspaper, television, and digital media organizations were conducted. Guest, Bruce, and Johnson (59) state that 6-12 interviews provide the ideal range to reach a point of saturation for qualitative interviews. Saturation is defined as the juncture in coding where no additional themes emerge with more data.

In an effort to maintain confidentiality of the journalists, the answers discussed in the next section have been anonymized. Each participant was assigned a number from J1 to J10 (Journalist 1-10), in the order in which they were interviewed.

**Table 1: Details of the participants in the study**

Participant	Gender	Age	Years in journalism	Name of media organization	Medium	Description of job title Reporter
J1	Male	28	5	The Indian Express	Digital + Print	Senior Sub Editor
J2	Female	24	1	Reuters	Online	Correspondent
J3	Male	27	1.5	The Hindu	Print	Reporter
J4	Female	38	15	The Times of India	Print + Digital	Lifestyle correspondent
J5	Male	38	15	Kannada Prabha	Print	Senior Journalist
J6	Male	72	46	The Statesman	Print	Executive Editor
J7	Female	60	15	Deccan Herald and The Hindu	Print	Feature Writer
J8	Male	37	15	News18 (Kannada)	Broadcast + Digital	Editor
J9	Male	51	24	Udaya TV	Broadcast	Senior Sub Editor
J10	Male	39	14	Public TV	Broadcast	Senior Bulletin Producer

### Validity and Reliability of the Qualitative Method

The validity of the qualitative method used was ascertained by including a diverse sample of journalists who emerged from a cross section of media organizations and occupied a variety of different roles. The participants' work experience ranged from 1 to 46 years. They worked across mediums like print, broadcast, and online publications and their organizations catered to local, national and international audiences. The inclusion of reporters working in varied newsroom setups, reflective of different gender, age, and seniority, was an attempt to reduce any bias towards a predetermined type of result. The semi-structured interview questionnaire used for the study was pilot tested with practicing journalists before it was administered to the sample. Questions and statements that seemed leading

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or beyond the scope of the study, were removed.

In an effort to establish reliability, the researchers undertook two steps. The first was to transcribe the in-depth interviews verbatim. Then, to ensure the credibility of what the researchers had captured, the responses were summarized and presented back to the interviewee for verification. Since in-depth interviews rely on understanding a phenomena from the point of view of a participant, credibility is predicated on the interviewee believing that their ideas have been accurately recorded. Then individual results for each respondent were analyzed first in relation to the study objectives and then interpreted again in the context of all participant responses. This was an attempt to get a more holistic outlook and understand the larger picture about prevailing thoughts and practices. Secondly, the researchers also relied on the canon of scholarship in the same area, presenting studies in the review of literature and comparing it with the findings of the data analysis, to offer another measure of consistency.

### **Analysis**

For analysing interviews, thematic analysis is considered the most commonly used qualitative technique. This approach, when applied systematically, can offer great clarity and answers into specific research questions (Judger 2). The data collected through the interviews with journalists was interpreted using the structure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) which involves becoming acquainted with the data, drawing up cursory codes, finding recurring ideas, refining the ideas, formulating themes, and articulating the analysis. The framework could be condensed into three main steps – transcribing, coding, and finding themes.

Firstly, all the interviews were transcribed. Secondly, a process of open coding was done to identify codes using sentences as the unit of analysis. Open coding implies that there were no set of predefined codes, but rather, the codes were created and modified during the coding process. The data was categorized in a methodical manner and the coding helped compressed the data into smaller blocks of meaning.

The third step was detecting themes from the data. A theme can be considered as a key idea which encapsulates and connects the data with the research objectives. A theme also constitutes a concept which recurs in the responses, creating patterns in the data set.

## **Themes and Findings**

### **(a) Access to News Stories**

Social media has sped up access to news stories. It has enabled journalists to get to sources particularly faster. Since news breaks on social media sooner, it is seen as a critical space to keep track of developing events.

Participants pointed to the vital role that social media played in information gathering, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. One journalist stated that in the early days of the pandemic, when strict lockdowns were announced, Twitter became the crucial forum for significant updates. "The Health Minister would tweet important information such as guidelines and release the daily numbers of Covid positive cases. Tweets became the new press releases" (J3). Social media platforms also make it easier to hold public figures accountable and get their response to a story. As a journalist (J3) explained, "If politicians do not respond over telephone or in person, we usually tag them on social media and get an answer."

Another participant stated that for each beat in a newspaper office, there is a specialized WhatsApp group comprising reporters from various different organizations. For instance, crime reporters get updates and clarifications on stories from the crime WhatsApp group chat. "Even without having to visit the location of the crime, we get the necessary details. Along with text, we can access photos and videos" (J6).

However, some participants were wary of stories encountered on social media. While some suggested it encouraged armchair reporting, others stated that one could not rely on social media alone. Often, stories encountered online, required additional fact checking. "In online stories, it is hard to discern fact from fiction. Social media cannot always be your only source, it has to be corroborated with on-field reporting" (J7).

### **(b) Selection and Filtering of News Stories**

In the seemingly infinite volley of information being published online, social media can assist reporters in understanding what users are paying attention to. Social media helps reporters assess the demands of their audience. It can affect what story is covered and how it is covered. Social media traction has become a parameter in deciding which issues are newsworthy. Some media organizations have a dedicated team that monitors social media platforms for stories. As one participant explained, "News

very often breaks on Twitter first. We have to keep a close eye on developing events. Once a story is selected, we verify it by checking if our competitors have covered it. Then we filter it based on the audience's preference. We ask whether the story would appeal to the general audience or our niche readers" (J2).

However, reporters admitted that while everything on social media might seem like news, not everything is newsworthy or true. "We don't pick up everything to avoid unnecessary correction. It is difficult to filter what is floating around on social media unless it is posted by an authentic source" (J2). Participants felt that while social media helps you understand how an issue is being debated by the audience, as the journalist, they still determined the perspective presented in the story. "Although social media has accelerated how quickly information is proliferated, the news values that Galtung and Ruge propose more than half a century ago, remain unchanged" (J7).

### **(c) Processing, Writing, and Editing of News Stories**

The way in which news stories are presented online has changed due to social media. An online news story is not limited to text alone, but could include multimedia content like photos, videos, interactive graphs, visualizations, picture galleries, and quizzes. Each story could also contain embedded links to related stories to encourage readers to engage with the content and stay on the news site.

In order to appeal to readers, headlines are often written as 'clickbait' – they are composed in an entertaining way that piques the curiosity of the audience. The language of the news story is kept simple. As one journalist explained, "Clickbait headlines attract readers. We need to cater to the layman. We put in extra effort to make sure a story is simple to understand" (J2). However, for breaking news stories, there is lesser scope for creativity. For long form pieces that take time to produce, multimedia elements are included to make the story appealing.

Many organizations also have style guides specifically for reporting content from social media. One participant (J3) mentioned that they are discouraged from quoting ungrammatical tweets. Another participant (J7) pointed that the reporter's vocabulary had to evolve to include new words that had gained popularity due to social media such as 'selfie' and 'influencer'. The inclusion of emojis was encouraged while posting a story on social media.

#### **(d) Distribution of News Stories**

Social media has helped journalists amplify the reach of their story. Each news organization has its own social media channels on various platforms. Content is custom made so that it is native to the medium. As one participant cited, "On Twitter, we have to convey the gist of the story within 280 characters. On Instagram, reels get a lot of views. We re-tell the story in 15-30 seconds" (J8).

Social media has also ensured that stories reach audiences within the journalist's network and beyond it. "When I re-post a link to my story on my Facebook, my story reaches all my friends living across the globe." Another participant (J3) explained that when news stories are reshared by public figures, it increases the reach of the story manifold.

#### **(e) Interpretation of News Stories**

Social media has also changed the way in which stories are construed by audiences. It has enabled them to respond to the coverage of a story in real time. As one participant stated, "I receive instant comments to my stories, both good and bad. The reactions can be very straightforward. Sometimes you have to learn to tune it out" (J4). Another journalist explained that not all responses are constructive. "Nasty comments are occasionally accepted by editors as legitimate criticism. But they may come from faceless trolls who are emboldened by a cloak of anonymity to say whatever they want" (J7).

Audience reactions also affect news judgment. A participant (J1) stated, "A silly issue that won plaudits on social media could replace a story with a larger impact that could not catch the attention of social media users." However, another participant (J3) argued that while social media helps newsrooms understand the mood of the public and the sentiment is around an issue, it does not shape how the story is written.

#### **(f) Fake News and its Effect on Newsroom Practices**

The proliferation of fake news has led to new positions opening up in newsrooms. A participant (J1) observed that fact checkers are replacing proof readers and entire websites dedicated to fact checking have emerged. Top journalists with clout on social media are expected to fact check those in power, especially when there is an incorrect claim made.



Journalists have to be more careful and vigilant when they encounter information online. "In social media, anyone can post material which looks authentic. We have to tread more cautiously. There is a greater burden to verify posts to avoid any errors in judgment" (J5). There is also specialized training conducted for journalists to spot fake news.

There is pressure to break stories instantaneously in order to stay ahead of competitors. But in some newsrooms, ensuring the veracity of a story trumps immediacy. "It is better to wait than to publish something you regret. There is an expectation on us to report the truth and we cannot afford to compromise on trust" (J10). Expressing a similar sentiment, another journalist explained that there may be a fear of missing out on a good story. Sometimes newsrooms receive online press releases which are photoshopped or encounter unverified information going viral. As one journalist remarked, "The fake news today is presented so convincingly. Anyone can publish anything online with no accountability. But without corroboration and cross-verification, we cannot use that information" (J6).

### **(g) Filter Bubbles and Newsroom Practices**

Due to the nature of social media algorithms, audiences only follow media outlets whose news coverage and political stances are consistent with their beliefs. Social media platforms serve as echo chambers, making it more difficult for users to get balanced stories or opposing viewpoints. This affects the extent to which newsrooms can find new audiences. One participant remarked, "It is harder to break through on social media to users who do not follow us. We might only appear in the feeds of our followers. We use hashtags to get a greater reach" (J2).

Another participant noted the inherent danger in personalized news feeds and said, "Audiences being in filter bubbles has made it easier for newsrooms with a hidden agenda to post propaganda content that might serve certain political or corporate ends. However, for those in the pursuit of objectivity, it has become more challenging" (J1).

### **(h) The Role of the Online Audience in the News Process**

Journalists do not view their audience as passive recipients of news anymore. All participants emphasized the democratic nature of social media and how it has empowered its users. Previously, legacy media had a limited number of platforms where audiences could articulate their opinion. Newspapers had a letters to the editor section. Broadcast listeners and

viewers could write to the radio or television station if they wanted to have their voice heard. But this was predominantly a one-way form of communication, which seldom elicited responses. On social media, audiences can offer their take on a story and share their opinions in real time.

One participant noted that social media users could download a news organization's report, edit it, add their observations, and re-upload it on their own channels. Audiences are increasingly participating in the news discourse and adding additional layers of commentary. There is a remixing of news content with audiences understanding news and re-framing it through their vantage points.

Participants also noted that not all social media users are media literate. This is particularly concerning in the context of how they perceive fake news. A participant (J10) exclaimed, "Some users share everything they find. Fake news spreads like wildfire. While reporting for newspapers or TV channels, we would stay away from communal stories. But on social media, stories about religion, politics, and other contentious topics are constantly debated. Social media fuels the fire of hatred". Other participants corroborated this by saying that online audiences had a greater responsibility, in terms of reacting to news coverage and articulating their views. Social media users needed to be mindful of the accuracy of the content they shared with the members of their online networks.

## **Conclusion**

On the basis of the interview responses, it is seen that contemporary newsrooms are migrating from a paradigm monopolized by traditional media practices to a more multifaceted news production process that integrates readers and viewers. Legacy media, like newspapers and television, have started to utilize social media to remain relevant to the needs of audiences.

Journalism has always adapted to the possibilities offered by new mediums. Social media, therefore, is no different. Rosen and Gillmore acknowledge the crucial role played by collective online communities (Viner). This is substantiated by the participants in the study who admitted that the process of collection, writing, production, publication, and distribution of news is now dependent on social media users. Acclimating and appropriating social media formats and trends is now an integral aspect of news creation.

The fundamental transformation of the news filtering process, as de-

scribed by the study's participants, is the embodiment of Brun's concept of gatewatching. Since the gates and channels on social media have multiplied beyond control, both trained journalists and regular users watch the gates of trustworthy organizations. If a story passes through these reliable gates, then it is considered worth pursuing. There is an added dimension to this changing role. As Shoemaker and Vos had theorized, social media users have taken on the role of the traditional gatekeeper. They are not dependent on news passing through the filters of mainstream media outlets anymore. They can circumvent these entirely and go to primary sources of information. Both Bruns and Pariser refer to this process of disintermediation or removal of the middleman (4; 31).

This study confirmed prior findings from research done by Iskandar (4) who identified that active involvement and interactivity between media and citizen reporters would be the defining feature of online journalism. Bruns (16) uses the term *produsage* to address this amalgamation of capabilities, of producers and consumers blurring as one.

It is interesting to note that this study marked a departure from the findings of research conducted by Hermida and Thurman (5) who chronicled a disinclination among legacy journalists in the United Kingdom in 2007 to include user-generated content into mainstream news reporting or surrender their gatekeeping tole. More than a decade later, this initial hesitancy by media establishments has given way to greater acceptance and mutual trust of consumer created content.

British and Australian journalists interviewed in Schapals' study advocated for vigorous and thorough fact-checking methods, a restoration of the watchdog role of media, a return to objectivity, combating misinformation, and cultivation of enduring public trust in the media. In a similar vein, the participants of the study in Bangalore stated that the provision for amateurs to participate in the act of journalism also brings with it a notion of responsibility. It is up to social media users to become more discerning, and separate truth from fabrications while reading and sharing news online. They must also be aware of the limited perspectives presented to them in their online echo chambers, and seek contrasting viewpoints around an issue to dismantle their filter bubbles.

To conclude, this study was an attempt to contribute to the understanding of the evolution of journalistic practices that is being witnessed by the media industry today. Future research in this area could include incorporating the audience to understand their experiences and consumption habits.

As digital advancements are made, with improvements in smartphone technology, proliferation of internet access due to cheaper data plans, and introduction of more features and multimedia elements in social media platforms (Newman et al.), both journalists and audiences will be empowered with better storytelling capabilities. They will also have more spaces and channels to communicate with one another.

The social impact of this study lies in the revelation that while it is important for journalists to be more inclusive of audience's perspectives and preferences, the fundamentals of news reporting such as fact-checking and ensuring objectivity, must stand the test of time. It is also pertinent for modern day reporters to be adept at harnessing social media tools to their advantage. Mandatory media training for reporters in digital news gathering, verification, and news writing is a must. Social media users must also recognize the privilege and responsibility that accompanies having the power to publish their own stories. Basic training courses in media literacy and conscientious media usage should be made available to on-line users by professional media practitioners. As new media evolves, this relationship of change and collaboration should be fortified and strengthened.

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