Mutualisation of News through an Engaging Media is a Safer Bet in the Age of Sustainability and Diminishing Advertising Revenue

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“Gone are the days of “us and them” journalism”, suggests that there is no longer any different between the audience and the journalists with the increasing level of normal people becoming “citizen journalists”. The use of new and digital media has given the audiences the power to produce their own media product and level up with the journalists, according to Editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger, now our journalists and readers as equal partners.”

- Yusra Khalid (Independent Blogger)

In 2010, the former editor of The Guardian, Alan Rusbridger, showed the world about the power of publicness through his Twitter posting revolting against the court injection on The Guardian to report on the dumping of toxic chemicals by the company, Trafigura. Trafigura became viral in Twitter: the result is more vigorous news stories and personal comments that could have possibly escaped from the newspaper pages. Calling this as ‘mutualisation of news’, Rusbridger underlined the collaboration of professionals and non-professionals in the dissemination of news. From a carefully filtered and controlled letters to editor, the role of readers or news consumers have traversed such distance that news are now produced by a collaborative effort. The Guardian’s ‘Comment is Free’ is a typical example of how the laymen or those having a journalistic flair or at least an opinion work together to build an interactive or collaborative news platform, a completely different experience social media platforms provide.

Alan Rusbridger comments “The mutualisation of news is a very powerful idea that particularly works for the Guardian, as our relationship with our readers is very strong. We can use the community of our readers in ways we would not have been able to in the past.” Rusbridger says that in order to make the members feel involved and more interested, the Guardian should build trust by behaving like the old-style mutual building societies. The web has led to a news community where ideas and news are shared rather than delivered, as new and digital media has become more accessible through the use of the Internet world wide. He also suggests that, “By continuing to go down this route, we will be more diverse and genuinely more plural than other media organizations and create a huge external resource. We need to continue breaking down the perceptions of a remote journalist who is a preacher, living distantly, and newspapers as being in bed with power and on the side of power, rather than the reader.”

As mutualisation gears its definition to wider spectrum, this issue of the Journal of Media Watch looks at the possibilities of using this concept in the developing world for journalism and news media. Journalism pays sustained attention to the coverage of ideas, policies, programs, activities and events dealing with the improvement of the life of people. As far as the developing world is concerned, media plays a pivotal role in keeping any eye not only on the governmental policies, but the larger human and societal developmental issues in the country. However the media in the developing world, both press and electronic,
is entangled in the serious competition amidst the clutter where they consider political
tussle and power struggle as the prominent matter to boost their readership or viewership.
Though the 24 hour news channels 'report', these are often news pieces 'to inform' rather
than 'to change'. This is same with the revolution of e-papers as well; print shifted to online
that eased readability for larger users, but added nothing to the wide opportunities that
the online platform provides news media. The role of people in this process is limited to
sharing the news links and posting comments only to the selective news allowed by the
newspaper. The downturn for journalism in developing countries lies here, while exciting
opportunities are wide open. If in 1969, George Varghese, a prominent journalist in The
Hindustan Times could make revolutionary changes through his fortnightly column, 'Our
Village Chatera' depicting the life in the village of Chatera that opened the windows towards
the rural life of India. In this era where technology has put forward immense opportunity
for journalists to embark on 'reporting for changes', we cannot see such advancements in
journalism.

News mutualisation is challenging the modern business model of business
marketing but is proposing a holistic approach to the media management on the goal of a
sustainable stable entrepreneurship through receiver (consumer) engagement. This
sustainability is ultimately essential as the advertisement revenue is deeply shrinking.
Mutualisation is now a safer bet than more corporatization or privatization. Future will be
glossy, if the product will be the part and parcel of human heart than the valets. This is a
phenomenon of value addition—increasing public value, credibility and firmly erecting
the roots of sustainability.

The biggest challenge is whether to involve the receiver in the process or product
of news industry? The ultimatum is the possibility of transforming the private owned or
state-owned news industry into a source-receiver mutually owned company of breakeven
sustainability. Government's budget deficit on public service broadcasting, diminishing
revenue from seasoned print advertisements, lowering viewership TAM rating and switching
to mobile and app oriented revenue generation is compelling for more and more news
mutualisation. Sharing is more important than liking, commenting is more important than
poking, emotions reaction rating is more vital than emoticons... More and more engagement
strategies to mutualisation is experimented.

As Roy Greenslade, the professor of Journalism, City University London opines in
his commentary "Although there is no certainty that they would be imperiled, a much safer
bet for them - and for those who benefit by watching them - would be mutualisation (or, of
course, the status quo). It would safeguard editorial independence". But the idea is not
inconceivable. Will there be a conflict of interest when the mutualisation be more diverse
and plural? How can the balance between local and global news can be maintained and
positioned? How can media integration possible with mutualisation? How shared media
platforms can increase the engagements? Diversity plus innovation is new order in the
news media world.

This issue of the Journal of Media Watch presents some of the novel research in the
process of information and news disseminations. The diverse content, the plurality of research
methods, the hyperglobal contributions will make this issue a splendid treat for the scholars
and academics.

Prof. T T Sreekumar from MICA—The School of Ideas, Ahmadabad and Dr. Milagros
Rivera-Sanchez University of Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa explores a grassroots
level mutualisation, how cybercafé's in small and medium Asian towns highlight new aspects
of modernity. Especially in the context of Asian modernity, the introduction of ICT-shaped
social spaces in the form of cybercafés leads to multiple conflicting rhetoric of empowerment
and progress on the one hand, and risk and moral degeneration on the other.
Prof. Myna German and Dr. Padmini Banerjee Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware, USA research reflects an extensive and in-depth review of the literature on the role of hyper-reality in our contemporary lives and its impact on our migratory decisions.

Jermaine Hekili Cathcart, University of California study seeks to assess the impact of the change in ownership upon the way African Americans are represented in BET’s programming. The study begins by placing black popular cultures roots in the minstrel show and shows how that form of media continues to plague American popular culture, and indeed, BET, today.

Prof. Bai Gui and Muhammad Arif of Hebei University, China traces the new channels of communication being used as intercultural communication tool to enhance the existing bond of friendship between China and Pakistan, the oldest strategic allies in the region. The study explores government initiatives, academic programs and projects aimed at promoting Chinese language and culture in Pakistan to boost cross-cultural communication.

Jayakrishnan Sreekumar of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore briefly analyze the articles and editorials appeared in Indian and foreign newspapers (The Hindu, India; The Guardian, UK; and The New York Times, USA on Sachin Tendulkar’s retirement from cricket. The retirement articles of other Indian great cricketers in these three newspapers were also analysed and compared with the articles on Tendulkar.

Kiran Bhatia from MICA—The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad investigates how new media networks have led to the personalization of the political sphere as it recognizes the significance of ‘the self’ over ‘the mass’ in democratizing the political discourse and give space to unaffiliated independent opinions to emerge. They let arguments and divergent views determine the construction of the ‘active collective conscience’.

Dr. Varsha Jain and Dr. Saumya Pant of MICA–The School of Ideas, Ahmedabad aims to uncover the role of mobile phone that has emerged along with the evolution of Generation Y. The digitized consumers of this generation need to be understood in light of the importance of family, friends and peers.

Sangita De and Priyam Basu Thakur at Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata attempt to conduct an explanatory research by using analysis of Twitter Revolution (Iran), Umbrella Revolution (Hong Kong), Sunflower Protest (Taiwan), Shah Bag Movement (Bangladesh), Delhi Gang Rape Agitation (India) and Bersih Movement (Malaysia). The paper identify the role of social media in mobilizing social movement of Asian region.

Arun Kumar and Dr. Mrinalini Pandey from Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad research revealed a positive impact of informativeness, entertainment, credibility and user-generated-content belief factors on attitudes and behavior of respondents. Structural equation modeling was employed to analyze the important factors and relationships among them.

Arun Mathew's paper is focused on the bribery among journalists. Several reasons from poor salaries to the culture of a place have been discussed as causative factors. The article poses many ethical and moral questions on the practices in the fourth estate.

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