Television News Dissemination over Facebook: Qualitative Analysis of Trends Observed in the Indian context

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The internet has influenced journalistic practice. The news gathering, processing, and dissemination processes have changed with the advent of the internet as a medium. News audiences were passive earlier, but that has changed with the proliferation of the internet. Today the audience is active, and the broadcasters have been taking note of the changing nature of the audience. In the context of news outlets in the pre-internet era readers sought the news contents, now that trend has reversed, and readers have a choice to choose news content from a large number of sources. These sources are largely internet based; in recent years social networks are emerging as a source of news for news consumers. Social networks formed through a peer to peer connection and Manuel Castell's term these networks as "Horizontal networks." In these networks people share and access personal things shared by their peers; it can be photographs, status, songs, and many other things. Such networks used for informational needs such as consumption of news. In the Indian context, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram being used by news broadcasters for the distribution of news. This paper specifically explores the utilization of Facebook for news dissemination. Thematic analysis of practitioners' interviews, the researcher intends to explore various aspects of television news dissemination over Facebook.

Keywords: Facebook, newsdissemination, social network, thematic analysis

The media landscape in India has changed rapidly over the past several years. Increased internet subscription and enhanced data transmission are the reasons for the rapid growth of internet subscribers in India. As of March 2018, there were 493 million internet subscribers in India as against 24.01 million internet subscribers in September 2012(Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2019). The growth in the number of internet subscribers has implication on cluttered Indian media space; theInternet is changing the way media content is getting created, distributed and consumed. The print and television media outlets are facing competition from web platforms. The growth in popularity of over the top (OTT) platforms such as Netflix, Prime Video, Eros Now, etc. and web-only news media outlets such as *The Quint, The Wire, ThePrint,* etc. indicates that the internet is causing disruptions in entertainment and news media space. To counter the competition from web-only media outlets, legacy media outlets attempting to reach out to readers and viewers via enhanced websites, Android and iOS applications,and social networking sites.

The growth of the internet has created opportunities and challenges for entertainment and news media. The proliferation of the internet has helped print and

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television news outlets to enhance newsgathering, news production, and news dissemination capabilities. The internet helps news organizations to reach out to new geographies and new readers and viewers. The digital technology helps media outlets to provide a rich experience to the readers using multimedia content. For news outlets, advertising is the primary source of revenue. The presence on the internet may translate into new addition in the readership and viewership for print and TV news media outlets In the case of TV news broadcasters as on 31 December 2016; there were more than 430 news channels alongwith print and online media outlets, it is a cluttered market. For any news media outlet, creating newer avenues for widening viewership is essential; the internet provides that opportunity to news outlets. Regarding recognizing the issues, topics,and subjects that interest the audience, social networking sites can help legacy news media organizations to identify such issues. For more bi-directional engagements with the audience and meaningful interactions legacy, news media organizations can use the internet. It can also help in catering to a diverse audience with more customized content, which was earlier difficult in the case of TV or newsprint because of lack of space and time.

The internet has created new avenues for widening the reach and providing rich media experience to the reader and viewers. However, it has created challenges for news outlets. The growth of internet spurred by the exponential growth of mobile phones and affordable wireless internet via 3G and 4G networks. Today people are moving from TV screens to mobile screens, from newspapers to e-versions of newspapers. The news consumption habits are changing;alongwith conventional interfaces such as TV and newsprint, it is being consumed on the websites, mobile apps, social media sites such Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and so on. Catering to changing habits is a challenge for conventional or legacy media outlets.

In this, context this paper looks at how Indian television news channels prepare for changing news consumption habits of the Indian news reader/viewer. Using the qualitative method of thematic analysis of in-depth interviews of media practitioners, this study intends to understand: (i) Factors behind the use of Facebook by news broadcasters, (ii) The relationship between the growth of the internet and changing news consumption habits and (iii) Complementary and competitive role of social media.

Literature Review

Before the arrival of digital media, electronic media emerged as a popular medium of audio-visual message dissemination. Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) has hinted at future where electronic media will empower different audience groups to have access to all the content. Capabilities of electronic media are such that the audience can have access to content or experience an event that is occurring at adistant location. Electronic media allows a large group of audiences to engage with the content together; it gives the audience an experience of "sharedness." However, electronic media is a form of one-way communication that allows only the source to disseminate information (Meyrowitz, 1985). In the case of digital media these dynamics changes, Nicholas Negroponte visualized digital media era where the audience is empowered to pull the content as per their choice.

In the 21st century, with the emergence of the internet and improvements in the interface between the source and the receiver has improved due to Web 2.0 technologies. Audience or the receiver or users were empowered to engage with content and allows the users to interact with the computer. In Negroponte's word,technological enhancement has transformed" information industry into a boutique business"(Negroponte, 1995). Meyrowitz and Negroponte envisioned electronic and digital media respectively. However, digital media is superior to electronic media. According to NancyBaym digital media has certain qualities distinct from print or electronic media. Digital media is digital, networked, interactive, hypertextual, automated, and databased. Digital media allows compressing,

altering the content; it allows two-way communication; its hypertextual nature allows linking different parts of the content; the automated quality of digital media allows automatic content alteration.

The legacy media organizations moved from analog technology to digital technology for enhancing the capabilities. The digitization of content changed the different processes associated with the media industry. It has changed the way audiences engage with the media. As posited by Castells The rapid spread of the internet has helped in creating online communitieswhich are constructed around individuals. The internet has changed the informationorganization and dissemination. Castells further adds that the internet has not replaced existing communication channels; people appropriated the internet as per their requirements (Castells, 2009). In the case of legacy media outlets, the internet is used for newsgathering, news processing and dissemination of news. The digitization of print or TV media content has paved the way for convergence. As articulated by Negroponte, Golding,and Murdock, digitization of statistical data, text, moving and still images and speech enables the computers can decode the content (Appelgren, 2004). That will blur the boundaries between the content and the communication technology-giving rise to an era of convergence.

Now-a-days the digitization of content paved the way for transmission of data through the internet. The digitized content made available across internet-enabled platforms. The ease of production and dissemination of digitized content attracted diverse audiences to the internet enabled platforms. Audiences moved from conventional media outlets to a new internet platform to satiate their information and entertainment needs. The emergence of convergence era did not finish the old media outlets. As argued by Meyrowitz the convergence changed the status of old media; it had to adapt to new communication technology environment to maintain and enhance their market share. However, for conventional media outlet adapting to new communication technology also means adapting to conventions of new communication technologies, as Jenkins posits that, the audience in a new communication system is migratory, socially connected and noisy. Conventional media companies need to reconsider the old assumptions about the audience. Jenkins describes the process convergence; it is top down as well as the bottom-up process. It is a top-down as the source to the receiver every element of the communication process has to adapt to convergence; it is a bottom-upprocess because convergence also occurs in the minds of the audience. Media companies need to understand how convergence occurs and provide content across all media platforms to demonstrate commitment towards the audience (Jenkins, 2006).

The media convergence has influenced the Indian media sector equally. The digitization of content and the proliferation of the internet has given rise to new communication space in India. The liberalization of the economy opened the media sector in India. It helped in the production of entertainment and informational content by private producers. In the case of television news in the 1990s, there were a handful of news channels whereas at the end of 2016 there are over 400 regional and national news channels (Athique, 2012). After 1991,the media sector grew significantly in India whereas the communication technology sector also demonstrated significant growth during this period. The internet launched in India in 1995, after two years there were only 0.14 million internet subscribers in India. However, within the last twenty years,the number of internet subscribers grew to 391 million (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, 2019).

It is not a surprise that in a cluttered market place like India, media outlets needed different modes to reach out to the audience. The internet as a medium adopted by Indian media outlets quickly in the year 2011 digital media advertising revenue was 15.4 billion rupees in the year 2016 it rose to 76.9 billion rupees. The growth rate of digital media is highest compared to print, television, radio and out of home platform (KPMG India-FICCI, 2017). These numbers demonstrate that media outlets and audience have adopted digital media in India.

In the digital media segment, social media and especially social networking sites are popular amongst internet subscribers worldwide and in India. As per FICCI-KPMG report 2017, thereare 299.7 million social media users in India; this number is likely to increase to 477 million by the year 2019. The influence of social media is such that India's public service broadcaster Prasar Bharti has acknowledged it. According to a report by a committee led by Sam Pitroda has recommended the formation of Prasar Bharati Connect to coordinate social media activity. Social media has changed the public sphere in India; it exists with print, television,and radio. It is emerging rapidly in India and contributing to democratic processes (Prasar Bharati, 2014).

The review of the literature examines the significance of electronic and digital media, its integration and necessity of such integration. In the Indian context, the economic liberalization not just opened media and information and communication technology sectors; it paved the way for the integration of media with information communication technology. The growth of the internet has paved the way to smaller media outlets to tap large media markets and has forced traditional players to adopt the internet for dissemination along with traditional modes of communication. In such a scenario, understanding how traditional media look at the internet for dissemination of news content would be an important area to study. This paper focuses on the application of social media especially Facebook for news dissemination.

Theoretical Framework

Manuel Castells posits that the mainstream media has established links with internet-mediated communication to understand the interest of the audience in various issues and topics and to influence information agenda. These two objectives necessitate convergence for legacy media organizations. It is because as argued by Henry Jenkins audience of digital media is "migratory" that necessitates legacy media organizations to provide content across different media platforms. The arguments put forth by Manuel Castells and Henry Jenkins provides a theoretical framework for this study. This framework helps in understanding the factors behind adoptions of the internet for news dissemination by Indian TV news organizations.

This study is a part of a larger study concerning media convergence concerning the English television news content. The study uses mix-method research to explore content convergence practices adopted byIndian TV news channels. The quantitative part of the study explores trends in the growth of the internet and trend in usage of internet for news dissemination by the news channels since the year 2009 until the year 2016. The qualitative part explores themes of news content shared on the internet and trends in the future. News channels have websites, YouTube channels, Android and iOS apps,and social networking sites. Observing trends across all the platforms is difficult. This study focuses on content sharing by TV news channels on social networking sites especially Facebook.

Research Method

Eleven media professionals were interviewed to achieve the objectives of the study. The interviews transcribed, and the method of thematic analysis applied to derive major themes emerging out of the transcripts of the interviews. The interviewees selected from media outlets and their roles with the organization. Telephonic interviews were conducted in February and March of 2017. Following questions administered to the respondents.
  (i)   How important is Social media in news dissemination strategy of a News channel?
  (ii) Why broadcasters have adopted social media, is it because of competition from other channels, is it because the viewer is consuming media beyond TV screening?
  (iii) How has growth in the number of Internet Subscribers and an increase in the number of smart-phones influenced news consumers' news consumption habits?
  (iv) Like in the case of airwaves, is there any competition concerning Facebook between news broadcasters?

Analysis

In the context of the above objectives, the following themes emerged in the interviews
Factors behind the use of Facebook by News Broadcasters

(i) Facebook has over 160 million Indian users; it's a large online community, to engage with a large number of people, news broadcasters use Facebook.

(ii) Facebook enters the most intimate space of the audience via mobile phone, tab, iPad,and desktop. The news stories appear on the personal Facebook page of a user. Facebook takes news content individually to the audience. Facebook enables the audience to share the content with friends and other acquaintances. That is a significant feature of Facebook.

(iii) Facebook has a wider and diversereach; it can engage audiences across different age groups. This feature of Facebook enables broadcasters to reach to newer audience thus enhancing news contents reach.

(iv) To engage a newaudience, Facebook used as a device to engage new set of audience, in News Broadcasters parlance Facebook is used as *"Hook"* i.e., by publishing salient features about news content in the Facebook post news broadcasters attempt to "pull" audience to the news channel.

(v) The interactivity feature of Facebook allows the audience of news channels to engage with the news content shared on Facebook. Journalists working with the news channels have an opportunity to engage with the audience directly, such interactions help in building credibility for the news broadcasters and the journalist.

(vi) Facebook helps in building campaigns around societal issues covered by news broadcasters.

Relationship between the Growth of the Internet and Changing News Consumption Habits

According to interviewees affordable internet connectivity and smart-phones have changed the way people communicate. It has changed the way people consume news. Today the eyeballs are shifting to small screens. This scenario is similar across rural and urban India. With wireless connectivity, the audience can access news and any other type of content anytime. The interviewees feel that with improved connectivity audience is moving towards small screen swiftly. The growth of the internet is a driver in changing news consumption habits, Indian news broadcasters have to devise a digital-first strategy.

Complimentary and Competitive Role of Social Media

At present social media plays a largelycomplementary role for TV news broadcasters.The digital nature of social media provides "asynchronicity" to the content shared in social media. TV news content shared on social media consumed anytime thus enhancing the reach of the content. Breaking news scenario is one instance where social media captured the space occupied by TV news channels. Today people using social media share the news they have come across instantly on social media platforms with still and moving images. According to one interviewee concept of "Breaking News" has changed with the emergence of social media.

Social media is a platform where the credibility of a TV news broadcaster is tested. The interactive nature of social media allows users to comment on content posted on social media. TV news content shared on social media platforms is open to feedback and criticism from the audience that puts additional responsibility on news broadcasters to maintain the credibility of the news outlet. The data connectivity has improved video streaming on social media platforms. The launch of 4G has improved data connectivity,and over the

past two years, social media is becoming a site of news consumption. Interviewees consider it as a challenge where news broadcasters need to work towards "pulling" audience from social media platforms to TV screens.

Conclusion

The interview with media professionals indicates that data connectivity and availability of affordable smart-phones have empowered people and it has created challenges and opportunity for the news broadcasters. News broadcaster can reach out to a diverse audience and aim to engage the audience atanytime of the day bytheasynchronous nature of social media. The interactive nature of social media helps in allowing two-way communication between the audience and the news broadcasters. It helps in building credibility for the journalists and the brand at large. These are opportunities provided by social media to the news broadcasters.

In the coming years, however, the scenario is tough for the news broadcasters. More and more users are accessing news and other content through social media. In such a scenario, creating enticing and engaging content is a challenge, further with enhanced and affordable data connectivity news content is consumed on social media platforms, moving the audience from social media to TV screens is another task for the news broadcasters. The "Digital-first" strategy essential for news broadcasters, the internet can help in engaging viewers across different age groups and beyond national borders. The Internet enables news broadcasters to scale up their intended audience; however, with enhanced viewership demand for diversity of content arises, news broadcasters will have workout strategies to address these requirements. One important dimension of digital media is interactivity. TV news broadcasters adapting to digital-first strategy will have to incorporate interactivity in the content. The interactivity is not just limited to viewers' reactions,but it also involves engagement via providing agency to viewers where members from viewers' community should be able to interact with content. The technologies such as 3D, virtual reality (VR), 360 videos can add value to conventional news content. While news on television can provide a limited experience, the same news content on the internet can provide an experience that is more engaging to the viewers. In the coming years in the technologically advanced and cluttered market, innovative techniques of content presentations can help TV news broadcasters to survive in the era of convergence.

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