

Editor's Note

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Backpack Journalism: Bridging the Divide

A few years back, a young journalism intern in the media industry would get to work in an area of newsroom specialization that would, most often, stay on with him. But not anymore.

Words like “sub-editor,” “desk person,” “copy editor,” and “correspondent” have become obsolete and out of step with the present time. Today’s journalist is a backpack journalist ready to shoot, edit, and write. In short, he is someone who can bridge the divide between copy editors, reporters, and photojournalists.

With the media industry increasingly retrenching on staff and cost, backpack journalism is not only encouraged but also considered a necessity. Backpack journalism has given rise to other synonyms like mobile journalism or MoJo—a leading Indian news channel sacked more than 100 support staff and asked its reporters to shoot, edit and send out videos using their cell phones. While backpack journalism has become the norm in the U.S., especially among smaller and mid-sized media organizations, it is fast catching up in India with several digital media startups resorting to this business model. Even as journalists may retain their specialized reporting beats like politics or sports, they have to adapt their reportage to the different media platforms online, from the relatively well-known ones like Twitter and Facebook to the more recent ones like Snapchat and Instagram.

While backpack journalism entails reporting across media platforms, a natural corollary flowing out of it is whether the communication curriculum in Indian universities is equipping students with reporting-across-platform skills. In the United States, most journalism schools across universities have made it mandatory for students to train in broadcast journalism and digital reporting. Academic assignments range from using Twitter for live reporting to publishing a news story as a photo slideshow online to content curation and data journalism. While big data is a nascent and a significant area of communication research, data journalism involves the online creation of content like maps and charts. A major Indian newspaper based out of Delhi and Mumbai has taken a welcome step in including data journalism as part of reporting.

It is due to the changing trends of the media industry across Europe and the U.S. that it becomes ever more critical to train budding journalists in modifying their news reports to suit different reporting platforms—from the more traditional print to the more recent online ones. While changes in news reporting have resulted in backpack journalism where a media person is a blend of a reporter, a photojournalist, and a news editor, the issues of media ethics, as we have known it for decades, also come under strain due to backpack journalism. First, there are few checks and balances before a news story is put out for the audience by a backpack journalist. Second, in a globalized and wired world, what’s ethical in one part of the globe may not be so in another region. Couple with issues of privacy and copyright, media content published by a backpack journalist sheds spotlight on having a global set of media ethics guidelines.

Just as a backpack journalist bridges the divide between several genres of specialization, the journal, *Media Watch*, acts as a bridge between practitioners and researchers of

journalism. The present edition presents several noteworthy research that would inform future studies in academia. AinaraLarrondo-Ureta et al. studied four European newspaper political blogs. They found that user engagement differed across nations while the audience has lower levels of dialogue and a lesser degree of participation of bloggers. The second research article authored by Loke Mun Sin and B. Omar focuses on how Korean culture impacts the grooming of the Malaysian population. They found that Korean cultural products had an impact on grooming among Malaysians. The more Malaysians viewed Korean cultural programs, the more favorably they were disposed toward Korean cultural products.

The third article, authored by Enwerem et al., studied the Nigerian media portrayal of fights between herdsman and farmers. The study found that Nigerian media relied on third-party sources that may have impacted the credibility of news sourcing itself. The article also researched the way the media portrayed the conflict. The fourth research article of the journal is authored by P.R. Obukoadata et al., who studied the role of digital media in marketing government policies and promoting civic engagement in Calabar, Nigeria. They found that the use of digital media in marketing government plans increases civic participation when such government plans are for the welfare of the citizens.

N. Antonopoulos et al. authored the fifth study where the researchers perused business models involving crowdfunding for online journalism. They concluded that almost half of international news media websites request their audience to support them in several different ways financially. The sixth research article authored by Isyaku Hassan et al. studied the portrayal of injuries sustained in playing football in the Nigerian press. Using content analysis as the instrument of study and agenda-setting theory, they found that injuries to knee, ankle, and hamstring are mostly reported by the press. Mukhtar el Kasim authored the seventh article that researched how Nigerian PR practitioners used social media. They found that a vast majority of P.R. practitioners used social media to enhance dialogue with their audience.

The eighth research article is authored by Yessenbekova et al., who studied how media in Kazakhstan addressed issues related to the younger lot among the population. The study offered a look at the younger generation in the country, and ways to correct strategies that such youngsters were employing in life. The ninth paper in this edition is authored by Dr. Viola Gjylbegaj. She researched how social media had influenced public relations practices in the U.A.E. The author concluded that social media had had a positive impact on P.R. practices. In the tenth and final research article Jinbong Choi researched how American news media is giving preference to the government's line of thought while framing international issues.

This edition of the journal provides a medley of issues that were researched by scholars from mostly developing nations and would encourage future scholars and practitioners of communication to consider the journal as a platform for showcasing their skills.

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