



Paradigm Shift in News Rooms

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ABSTRACT

As in the West, the mainstream media in India too seems to be losing its ground to modern day cutting edge technological advancements. Laptops, smart phones and tablets with 3G data connections have severely affected both the print and electronic media. No newspaper or news channel can truly claim today to be the 'voice of the people'. On the other hand social media is emerging as a powerful medium of communication, especially among the youth. The question nagging the media planners is whether the prediction of US scholar Philip Meyer that "the last newspaper in the US will be printed in first quarter of 2043," will prove to be correct in Indian context also. Whatever is the case, mobile applications on android have put the future of Indian media under radar. Therefore, the News Rooms in all media houses, whether print or electronic, are struggling to evolve strategies to overcome the challenge. It is almost 'adapt or die' situation.

KEYWORDS

Paradigm Shift, Media Houses, News Room, Netizens, etc.

Introduction

Arthur Miller said in 1961, "A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself." Can the mainstream Indian media claim to be so today? "Absolutely No," say media experts. Internet has radically altered the entire media operation—from news gathering to processing and delivery. The media—newspapers, magazines, news channels or radio—which till a decade back enjoyed absolute freedom on what to serve and what to censor, are now "facing the crisis of exclusive news". Alan Rusbriger, editor-in-Chief of 'The Guardian' while delivering the annual Hugh Cudlipp (founder editor of 'The Mirror') lecture on January 25, 2010, went on saying that "most scoops have a life expectancy of about three minutes." Alan's observation seems to be proving correct in Indian context also—thanks to the rapid growth of social media and technological empowerment of the common men. Loss of 'exclusiveness' is just one aspect. The crisis is far deeper. The prerogative of breaking the news too is no more with the traditional media. In majority cases, it is done by the 'netizens' or the common men using mobile phones. Some media experts, however, see it as "democratisation of news", majority look at it as "a warning bell for traditional media".

The department in media houses, which is under extreme influence of ICT, is the 'News Room'. Technology has entirely upside down it. Everything from news gathering to processing and delivery has drastically changed. The overall focus now is on 'packaging'. The hyper local news, which sometime back found scant space, is now the top priority. Not only newspapers, but also the news channels are getting hyper local. Top circulated newspapers like 'The Times of India', spare 8 pages for local news. Today there are hyper local editions of most of the newspapers at district level. Hindi news channel, 'Aaj Tak', operates an exclusive news channel, 'Delhi Aaj Tak' for local news. The web portals of the newspapers or channels too are getting hyper local. 'Dainik Bhaskar' has successfully done it in Indore and reportedly is in the process of capturing the entire Hindi belt. 'Amar Ujala' is also following the suit. Some newspapers have now started providing "content on demand with audio visuals support". It is in this context that the study of emerging trends in News Room becomes essential.

The power of Social Media

The print circulation is at decline in the US, Western Europe, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and in many other countries. Internationally recognised magazine brand 'Newsweek' has already stopped print edition in December 2012 and 'The New York Times' is said to follow the suit soon.

However, the decline in India, mainly in case of daily newspapers, is comparatively low. But the readership of general interest magazines, mainly on news and current affairs, is heavily affected—first by 24x7 news channels and now by internet and social network. The owners of media houses who have visualised the threat are burning midnight oil to find the ways to survive. Since internet is spreading like viral, they are trying to trap the rapidly growing group of 'consumers'.

As on November 7, 2014, a total of 924,318,927 people in India out of total 1,262,090,000 population had mobile phones and 20 per cent of them use Smart Phones. The figure is expected to rise up to 32 per cent by 2017. Google India claims around 94% Indian smart phone users use the device to access internet and 56% of them access internet multiple times a day (in US, the number stands at 53%). Today India has over 243 million internet users and by the year 2018 almost half the country will be connected through internet. "Even at the current growth rate, we will have 500 million Indians on Internet by 2018. By the end of this year, India will become larger than the U.S. in terms of number of internet users," said Rajan Anandan, managing director of Google India, while addressing 'Digitizing India' conference organised by FICCI Ladies in Delhi on August 12, 2014.

Apart from it, India has 100 million Facebook users—second largest market worldwide. Similarly, for LinkedIn, India is the second-largest market, while Twitter India is set to be the third-largest market in terms of user base. According to research firm e-Marketer, India will account for third-largest user base on micro-blogging site Twitter at 18.1 million by the end of this year. On the other hand, there were 82,237 registered newspapers in 2011 and 392 news channels as on March 10, 2014.

Major Emerging Trends in News Room

These figures indicate to the strength of both traditional and social media. To understand the changes caused by technology during the last two decades we need to understand the following emerging trends in News Room—both print and electronic media:

- **News Gathering Shifts to Public Domain:** Traditionally, news gathering has been the exclusive prerogative of journalists. But now the major contribution in 'news pool' is from the society. A vast pool of news, views, opinion and ideas is available in public domain and even the big media houses take good quantity of input out of this pool. Even the news from

political parties, leaders or Parliament is no more exclusive. The press releases or tweets by leaders or parties become public within seconds. Finding no way out the media now take news from citizens, television, internet, micro blogging sites, twitter, facebook, etc without any hesitation. Interesting part of this change is that media houses invest huge amount on creating infrastructure, while the netizens do it free of cost. "A media house can claim exclusiveness of any news only in the case if it is done by its own correspondent and is kept away even from its own website before going to press. However, it is difficult to claim whether the news termed 'exclusive' is really exclusive and is not already available in public domain like facebook, blog, etc," says Jagdish Upasane, former editor of 'India Today' and now director of Makhnalal Chaturvedi Rashtriya Patrakarita Vishwavidyalaya, Noida Campus. He claims that many leading newspapers take about 45 per cent content from internet. However, NK Singh, senior television journalist, disagrees with the argument that the media does not have adequate exclusive content.

• **Lose of Power in Moulding Public Opinion:** The power of moulding public opinion has also been snatched away by netizens from the mainstream media. It can be witnessed from Jashmine revolution in Tunisia, Arab and China to Anna Movement in India against corruption or the elections of Barrack Obama in the US and Narendra Modi in India. "Social media is so powerful that majority news channels or newspapers now decide their top stories following the trends on social media. Sometimes the news published by newspapers or telecast by channels is basically circulated by social media days before. In this way technology has brought the media at par with the society," claims Prafulla Ketkar, editor of 'Organiser'.

• **Stakeholders turn Competitors:** Traditional media is no more the only Producer of News now. Their readers are their immediate 'competitors'. Sometimes netizens are seen powerful than the media houses. Realising it, the newspapers and channels tried to woo netizens in the name of 'Citizen Journalism'. But that trick too failed. "Many times the netizens laugh at the media when they see any news, which they had circulated days before. In that case the advertisers also refuse to give advertisement," argues Hitesh Shankar, editor of 'Panchjanya'.

• **Getting Hyper Local:** The reason why the newspapers and news channels are getting hyper local is that netizens are yet to enter there. 'The Times of India', 'The Indian Express', 'The Asian Age' in English and 'Dainik Jagran' in Hindi have special supplements for local news. 'Aaj Tak' has two channels in Delhi—'Delhi Aaj Tak' and 'Tez' for local news only. "It will not be a surprise if Aaj Tak starts 'Tez Shahdara', 'Tez Gurgaon', 'Tez Faridabad', 'Tez Ghaziabad', 'Tez Noida', etc in coming years focussing on even the minor issues like blockage of sewer in a particular street or house," says Upasane. Upasane's logic holds water as in the Europe it has already begun. The city based websites there have snatched this area also from the mainstream media. A website operated in a particular county of London provides complete information about the county. It may be a reality in India also soon. 'Dainik Bhaskar' and 'Amar Ujala' have already started it. Bhaskar is reportedly going to start its own cable, FM channel to capture the city market. "But how far they remain hyper local is also doubtful, as the netizens too have starting getting hyper local," asks Upasane.

• **Emphasis on Views:** Another major trend in News Room is that views coverage is more than the news. Even in the news, views are incorporated freely. It is more in news channels. That is why there is debate even on minor issues. "The fields where traditional media still has upper hand are the coverage of accidents, wars, riots, landslide, cyclone, etc. But these occurrences are uncertain," Upasane quips.

• **'Smart Packaging' is the New Mantra:** The main emphasis in News Room today is on ideation—how to serve the old news with attractive 'Smart Packaging' equipped with good layout, photos, aesthetic sense, multi colour printing, etc. It is

crucial time for journalists as how much imaginative they can be. "Packaging too will not work for long until there is solid content," says Anil Pandey, editor, 'News Bench' newsmagazine.

• **Personalised Content:** Some newspapers have now started providing content on demand. However, there is nothing exclusive in that too. It is a trick to engage the readers. Now 'convergence' is being said to be the answer to social media. Convergence is bringing people of all departments together in thinking and action.

• **Pay Wall no Solution:** When it was noticed in the US that some people sitting in their rooms pick up useful news from their paper and circulate in their groups even before the newspapers are in the market, majority newspapers installed Pay Walls on their websites. But the people refused to pay for it as they had access to many other portals for the same news. Finally, they had to remove the Pay Walls. That is why the newspapers in India are not in a position to put 'pay wall' on their websites. They are in confused state. Today, Google gets more advertisements than 'New York Times'. It is because Google has collaboration with many newspapers for providing news to users. "In coming days if we have a strong search engine than Google and that starts providing better news than Google, people will take up that. Then the media may face more critical situation," warns Upasane.

• **Other Changes in News Room:** Other notable change is the closer of libraries and total dependence on Google. The editor is now in multiple roles like manager, PR person, etc. Now the main focus in editorial planning is producing the content, which suits more to the advertisers. Even in daily editorial planning the marketing department has an active role. Now the editors do not have any ego problem, which was high just two decades back.

• **The Trends in the Offing:** A look at the technological advancements in the pipeline suggests that the time is not far when pictures on newspaper websites will be in motion. One will not need to read, the visuals will explain everything. It is already in some advertisements. There will be amalgamation of text and visuals. The smart phones may also be thin like paper with high capacity to store more video, text, audio and other things. May be the newspapers install their kiosks at village Chaupals or at crossings in cities disseminating news free of cost. The technology to provide news on mobile phone even without internet is already working in European countries. It may come any time in India as 'Doordarshan' has already started work on it.

"One should not wonder if tomorrow the newspapers are in Harry Potter book style. The ICT can make it possible. Those who use it will survive and those who ignore are sure to reduce to their own office complexes," says Nisheeth Joshi, Resident Editor of 'Amar Ujala', Noida. Dr Vartika Nanda, Assistant Professor in Department of Journalism at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, Delhi University, feels that technology is going to change the "entire geography of the media". Awadhesh Singh, senior columnist, visualises "a robot like system in News Rooms where there will be no need of human beings". Nisheeth Joshi visualises complete virtual news room where there will neither be any high rise office building nor people will have to come to the office. Everything will be done online. Even the people will be hired and fired online only.

1. **Will the Print Vanish?:** The big question today is whether the calculation of Philp Meyer will prove to be correct in Indian context also? Many media experts however disagree, but they do visualise major challenge in the time to come. "The present growth in circulation and readership (more than 110 million copies of daily newspapers are sold) of some newspapers is a positive sign for print. The prime reason of it is growth in literacy rate, increase in awareness among people about democratic rights, and the desire to know more," says Dr Ravindra Agrawal, veteran journalist who worked with

many leading newspapers. "Nothing will happen to the print if it continues to adapt to the changing technology," opines veteran journalist Dr NK Trikha adding that similar arguments were made when Radio and television came in India. But senior TV journalist and former advisor to Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh, Sudhish Pachauri and senior journalist Dilip Mandal see a clear crisis before the print media in coming days.

2. How to Survive: The 'threat' is clearly visible. How to overcome is the big question before planners in News Room. Veteran journalist Dr Ved Pratap Vaidik stresses the need that journalists need to be more proactive and unbiased. Assistant Professor in Indraprastha Guru Gobind Singh University Dr Sarvesh Dutt Tripathi says journalists should be allowed to report the truth and must not be compelled to write what the marketing department wants. "If we fail to act today the new generation of print media will have to face a severe crisis," says Prashant Mishra, political editor of 'Dainik Jagran'. "Newspapers are converging all their resources, technologies and platforms to get maximum reach and, of course, advertisements—the bread & butter of media. Management, marketing and advertisement departments while collaborating with the news room are working in tandem—to get maximum audience and business. This is their survival mantra as of now," feels Jagdish Upasane.

Television and Radio

The news channels are also struggling to keep themselves on board. Competition, lack of revenue support and unstable viewership are all testing their nerves. TRP of most of the news channels is lower than the entertainment channels. It clearly indicates that the news channels cannot survive merely on packaging of hard news and current affairs. Exclusiveness of content is the key and news channels cannot compete with newspapers in this area. Equally, listening of news, views and current affairs on radio is already down. FM stations are getting popular, but due to the light content. What people called a revival of radio after introduction of FM channels is in fact a revival of entertainment radio, not the news radio. Getting hyper local can be the key to success for FM radio. "The newsroom has to become a hub. Only then every print, audio, visual newsroom will be able to get the traffic of audience," opines Jagdish Upasane.

The Indian media has been adapting to changing technology since inception. It happened when the radio and television came. Undoubtedly, those who adapted excelled, and those who missed the opportunity became history. Similar thing may happen now.

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