



is Media Practitioners' Gen-Next Attracted to Social Media-Induced Freedom from Professionalism & Ethics?

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ABSTRACT

Social Media—The simple term that has swiftly made its way into our lives has already redefined both Society and the Media, and the very concept and purpose of these two vital identity-institutions. Facebook and Twitter like star players of the Social Media are now preferred choice for almost anything from sharing our feeling to voicing dissent over the affairs of global politics. On this free medium, an average person in any part of the world can express his views without undergoing the editor's axe like in traditional media. And the reluctance in an introvert to face society while presenting his views has been overcome by the virtual nature of this interactive platform. But is the freedom from professionalism and journalistic ethics offered by Social Media Networks also luring the upcoming media practitioners so as to be their preferred choice for expressing views? In this research paper, the researcher has tried to find an answer to the question by studying the behavior of randomly selected media students.

KEYWORDS :

Introduction

Social Media—The simple term that has swiftly fitted into our world has already redefined both Society and the Media, and the very concept and purpose of these two vital identity-institutions. As it existed until recently, Society had at its base a bonding between individuals sharing a region, an idea, a thought, or even a purpose. And Media used to be the amalgam of channels that disseminates information and knowledge, and thus beckoning change. These closely interlinked institutions worked in conformity of sorts—each acknowledging and respecting the limits or boundaries of the other. Society remained as Society, and Media as Media until the onset of Social Media reshaped these institutions. Now, Society is not confined within the geographical or ideological boundaries. Rather, the boundaries have blurred, giving way to hybridization of thoughts and to that of the cultures as well. It is not rare nowadays to see a man on North Pole identifying with a woman in the South Pole more than he identifies with the people living in his geographical proximity. And, consequently, their thoughts and cultures may have become a mix of Northern and the Southern extremes of the globe, ultimately resembling a stranger living somewhere close to the equator. Media too isn't only about newspapers and TV Channels anymore. Media, as in Social Media, is faster, sharper than its revered, traditional predecessors whose word, if it may not be an exaggeration to say, used to be a Gospel truth for the audience. Its channels have changed, pace has increased, and above all its purpose has undergone a transformation. It is now a technology defined world and technology is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools. Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies (Castells, 1996).

Social Media or Social Media Networks (SMNs) essentially involve internet-based-interactive-applications that allow sharing and modification of the user generated content. As part of Information Communication Technologies, SMNs can be defined as the online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration (Newson & Houghton, 2008).

Under the classical definition of SMNs thus fall blogs, micro-blogs, web portals, and social networking sites. And the stars in this arena have been 'Facebook', 'Twitter', and 'Weblogs' which are perhaps the foremost receivers of public response to development of any nature or intensity.

Launched in 2004 exclusively for students of Harvard, Social networking site 'Facebook' has grown into the most dominant social network across the globe with more than half of its 800 million-plus users from outside the United States.

On Facebook, the users interact via 'status updates', 'chatting', 'tagging and liking', and by 'sharing pictures'. What has made 'Facebook' a stronger platform though are the options available to users of creating 'pages' and 'events'. Twitter was launched in 2006 as a micro-blogging site for netizens to post and share 140 characters-long messages. The message can be read and 'followed' by other users on the site, thus creating a network of netizens. Twitter users can 'follow' or 'subscribe' to the updates of other users including that of media networks, celebrities, and friends. It gains them easy access to important internet-links and information that may otherwise be too scattered to lay hands on to. And the Blogs or Weblogs are the other most important constituent of the SMN world. These are content management tools on which the users can add new content to their website through a web interface. It is a user-friendly option not requiring any technical or programming skills.

The interactive options offered by these behemoths of SMNs are being suitably exploited by the netizens to generate debates, motivate the users to support or oppose the issues of importance. From pictures of a riot to videos of Tsunami to and comments on Mission Mars, everything briskly finds its way on to the SMNs, and instantly informs the global audience. "Interactivity is the primary characteristic of new technologies..." and it has caused a considerable reassessment of communication research (Morris & Organ, 1996; Pavlik, 1996). And the use of interactive features allows for immediacy of information, increased communication with and among readers, personalized journalism that is tailored to one's liking, and non-linearity of information (Rich, 2003). It is liberation of the society, as said by Google executive and Facebook activist, Wael Ghonim: "If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet" (Hofheinz, 2011, p. 1417). And transformation of the political society wherein "democracy is just a tweet away" (Morozov, 2011, p. 37). now. The tools of documentation and truth-telling into the hands of ordinary citizens, SMNs create limited activists who can contest the narrative-crafting and information-controlling capabilities of authoritarian regimes (Duncombe, 2011). Speeches, articles, images, and documents are constantly being recorded and placed online to create an accessible archive of information. This has a cathartic effect for a society that has operated under oppression and censorship (Iksander, 2011). More importantly, however, it is like taking over the role of traditional media. SMNs have almost out-paced the traditional media channels in breaking the news to audience, posing in the process a stiff challenge to the practitioners of former to survive the information technology onslaught. In fact, traditional media itself is keenly watching over the SMNs for scoops, first hand information of new developments, and for recorded responses of the society.

Internet users actively search for information by clicking on links or using search engines, suggesting the Internet is a more goal-oriented medium (Eighmey,1997).

In empowering the common masses with tools of information dissemination,

SMNs have freed its practitioners from requirements of professionalism and technical expertise that qualifies one to be a traditional media practitioner. One is not required to have undergone Journalism training to break the news or express views about serious matters on SMNs. A little knowledge of the language, amateurish writing skills, and wholesome urge to express oneself is all that is required to be a commentator of social, political, or economic matters on SMNs. The 'editor's axe' that cuts out the unprofessional and unethical lines from a traditional media practitioner's piece, is missing in SMNs. An emotional piece potent of sparking violence or invoking violence or hatred can surface unedited on the writers blog or social media sites. Through SMNs, public opinion can thus be modified in ways that may not always be healthy for the society, and by the people who do not necessarily qualify to be the opinion leaders in the society. Needless to say perhaps that it is already starting to happen. For the first time in our history, the news increasingly is produced by companies outside journalism, and this new economic organization is important. We are facing the possibility that independent news will be replaced by self-interested commercialism posing as news. (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2001).

Traditional media undergoes a modification in practice or otherwise every time a social or technological advancement takes place. Print Media started with the onset of printing technology, broadcast journalism underwent a boom with the start of cable technology. Each time there has been a period of significant social, economic and technological change, a transformation in news occurred (Kovach & Rosentiel, 2001). Redistribution of news by the internet is threatening traditional media organizations.

But is the freedom from Professionalism and Journalistic ethics offered by SMNs attracting the upcoming media practitioners also? The researcher has attempted to answer the question by studying behavior of the journalism students.

Objective of the study

1. To find out whether the freedom from professionalism and Journalistic ethics is making SMNs a preferred medium for expressing views.

Research Methodology

The researcher followed the questionnaire method to know preference of the respondents between Traditional media and SMNs for expressing views and opinions. The Questionnaire include a total of seven questions, so designed that it revealed the respondents' frequency of logging onto the SMNs, their preference between traditional media and SMNs, and their reasons behind choosing either of the two.

Universe of the study for this research was five journalism schools in Kashmir Valley including three postgraduate and two undergraduate schools. Overall 100 respondents were selected, randomly choosing a total of 20 potential respondents from each journalism school. Before distributing it among the potential, the questionnaire was tested by first distributed it among a group of five students—one each from five journalism schools. The suggestions from the respondents were duly incorporated into the questionnaire to prepare the final set of questions.

The questionnaire was eventually handed over the potential respondents personally by the scholar or through emails. The responses were collected by the researcher after three days, and data analysed to attain the objective.

Research Findings

The study establishes that majority of Journalism are indeed attracted by the freedom from professionalism and journalistic ethics offered by the SMNs in expressing views.

About 96 % (96 respondents) of the journalism students studied for this paper say they are daily users of the SMNs while 4 % (4 respondents) log on to the SMNs as and when needed. Of the overall respondents, 79% (79 respondents) agree that they prefer SMNs over the traditional media for registering their opinions on social or political issues. And of the 79 respondents who prefer SMNs, 63.12 % (50 respondents) do it because their "opinions are registered unedited on social-media while traditional media would enforce a lot of editing due to professional and ethical concerns." 16 (20.25%) prefer SMNs because added accessibility offered by SMNs; 7 (8.86%) prefer SMNs because every opinion registered on SMNs generates debate; and 6 (7.59%) are lured by the reach of SMNs. The responses are illustrated through Figure 1.1 below.

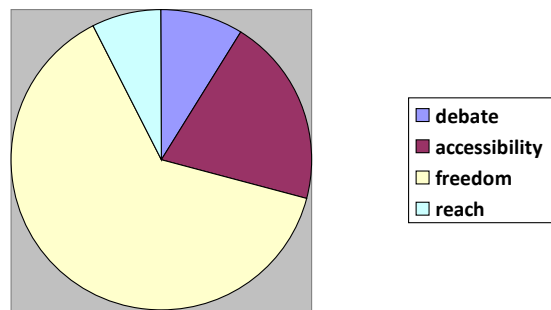


Figure 1.1: Showing how accessibility, freedom (from professionalism and ethics), reach, and debates generated on SMNS make journalism prefer SMNs over traditional media.

Only 21% (21 respondents) say they still prefer traditional media over SMNs for voicing opinions. And of them, 09 (42.87%) out of the belief that traditional media is still taken more seriously by readers; 05 (23.81%) do it to have sense of professionalism and journalistic ethics inculcated in themselves; and 07 (33.33%) believe that traditional media allows them to elaborate their opinions. Please see the figure 1.2 below.

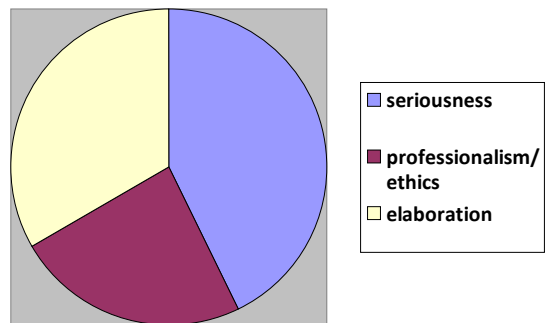


Figure 1.2: Showing how much seriousness of traditional media, professionalism and ethics, and opportunity to elaborate attracts the journalism students.

Interestingly, 76 % (76 respondents) rate SMNs as better than traditional media in terms for voicing opinions on issues of social or political importance; 03 % (03 respondents) find traditional and SMNs at par with each other. 16% (16 respondents), however, find traditional media better than SMNs while 05 % (05 respondents) believe the traditional media cannot be compared with SMNs because of benefits offered by the latter. See figure 1.3 below.

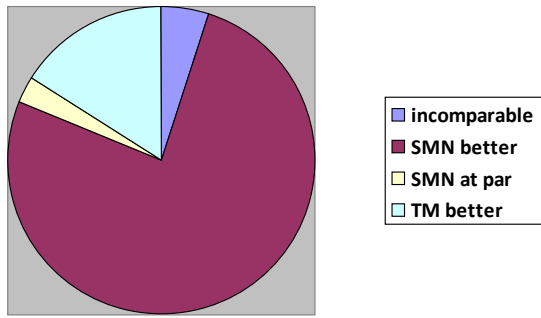


Figure 1.3: The picture shows how journalism rate SMNs and Traditional Media (TM) in terms of expressing their views over either of the two.

The study also revealed that the a majority of the journalism students may be finding SMNs too attractive to look towards traditional media for making themselves heard. 81% (81 respondents) said because of SMNs they no more attempt to write opinions pieces for traditional media; 17% (17 per cent) say their urge to write opinion pieces for traditional media is decreasing; and 02 % (02 respondents) said their prefer reading responses and views of people on SMNs. See figure 1.4 below.

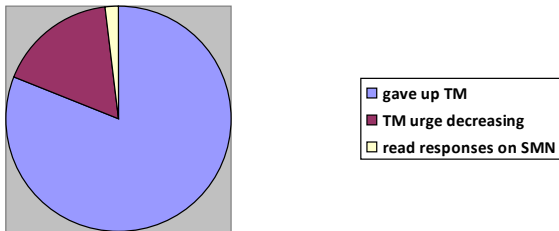


Fig 1.4: Figure shows how SMNs have affected the students' association with TM.

In this study, the researcher also asked journalism students about their first response to any social or political development. And 83 % (83 respondents) said they would express their opinions through SMNs; only 09% (09 respondents) said they would write a letter or opinion piece for traditional media. Only 02 % (02 respondents) said they would not react, while 06 % (06 respondents) prefer to indulge in debates on SMNS. See figure 1.5 below.

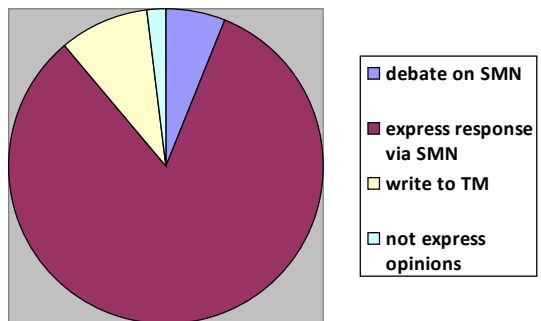


Figure 1.5: Figure shows the preferred first response of journalism students to any development of social or political development.

Finally, the study showed that the SMNs are becoming journalism students' preferred choice over traditional media. 67% (67 respondents) said SMNs is becoming their permanent over traditional media; 19% (19 respondents) said their use of SMNs for expressing opinions is increasing; and in only 1% (1 respondent) feels his use of SMNs is decreasing. 13% (13 respondents), however, said their use of SMNs is facing to compete with their use of Traditional media. See figure 1.6 below.

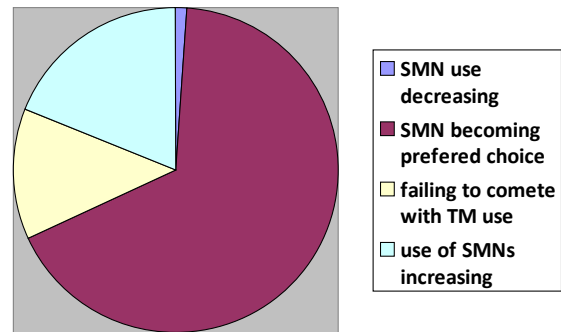


Figure 1.6: Figure shows how students' use of SMNs for expressing views if changing.

Conclusion/Discussion

Social Media has changed the face of the world, creating almost a virtual world within the real world for people to express ourselves, discuss, debate, and respond with increased vigor and authority. The meaning of social bondages has undergone a transformation, and so has the role played by the traditional media. These two interconnected identity –institutions have come together in Social Media or Social Media Networks to redefine themselves and their purpose to the human race.

Added interactivity offered by the SMNs has attracted majority to participate in the debate on issues concerning society and politics. But this study has established that freedom from professionalism and journalistic ethics offered by SMNs attracts most journalism students for expressing their views—majority journalism students prefer SMNs over traditional media for expressing their views. Also, the study showed that expressing views on SMNs is the first preferred reaction of the journalism students every time an issue of social or political concern occurs.

The trend can be discouraging for the age-old profession of Journalism. Media has been playing a vital role in the society by being the watchdog, trendsetter, or opinion builder through a cautious professional and ethical practice of information dissemination. If the upcoming journalists seek freedom from professionalism and journalistic ethics for expressing their views, can they sustain the motivation of being watchdogs of the society? And if their disregard to professionalism and journalistic ethics grows, what becomes of the society they are destined to play a crucial role in? Traditional media may have to come up with sustainable alternatives to withstand the challenge posed by SMNs.

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