Impact of ICT on Journalism: A Case Study from Meghalaya

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Abstract

The world has moved to the information age and so the growth of interconnection between the global communications. Consequently, it can be precisely described as "Global Village" and the media being a carter of information has grown and improvised with the aid of technological development. The introduction of information communication technologies (ICTs) in the field of journalism has transformed various aspects of the profession and as well benefited the public with the ways of obtaining news and information. The traditional methods of spreading the message to the masses and their transition to the new technological era have been a significant part of this article. Besides, the paper also analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of its uses among the media practitioners of Meghalaya.

Keywords: Journalism, Traditional method, Information technology, Media practitioners, News and information.

Introduction

Evolution has transformed and brought in many changes into the course. Human society has now evolved to the age of information where news around the globe could be instantaneously updated every moment using the latest technology made available through the wonders of scientific development. This development has taken different forms through different mediums of communicating to the masses. There was a time when a simple message would take weeks or months to reach its destination but with the passage of time, today, one can receive news in a split of second which can be further tailor-made to one's own liking. This attainment would aptly define the "Global Village" which has crossed over the limitation of barrier of global communication. The shifting of mode of communication became possible because of the introduction of information communication technology (ICT). According to Rodriguez and Wilson [15], ICT is seen as a set of activities which facilitate and enhance the processing, transmission and dissemination of information by electronic means.

The term "information society" came into use along with new information and communication technologies (ICTs)-internet, email, mobile telephones, etc. These interactive, performative and participatory technologies of communication are at the heart of the communication revolution that is occurring in India [8]. Therefore, these technologies have the capability to deliver the information in the form of audio, video format, which was not possible before. The computerized sources are regularly used in media organizations for various purposes. They either benefit the journalist in their field or in disseminating the news.

The barrier between the print and the broadcasting sectors of the media is getting blurred. The different features of online news are somewhat comparable to that of broadcast news. As both provide the latest updates of the events, live broadcast or live streaming of panel discussions or debates are becoming popular among internet users. Deuze [6] emphasizes on the effect of the internet because of its key characteristics of online journalism, which include hypertextuality, interactivity and multimediality. These features have affected the journalism produced on the web which also redefines journalism and its culture as a whole. He argues that the internet affects journalism by its introduction into the newsroom on the desktops of journalists, and by its creation of online journalism.

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The ability to view and comment on the web, and invite the audience and the experts, makes it an interactive medium. The mobile users can access news websites from anywhere and at any time of the day. Now, the journalists need to have digital knowledge in order to know where to move for the news. Digital training is a necessity and digital journalism is constantly developing; tools and methods are changing every day. Today's reporters have only a fraction of the skills needed to survive in the modern newsroom. Digital storytelling is a must to survive in the long run [2].

Conventional Methods

Before the advent of the British in India, the land of *Ri Hynniewtrep* (Seven Huts), comprising the Khasi, Jaintia Hills, Ri Bhoi and Ri War and several indigenous administrative states had emerged.

The utilization of oral method for disseminating news and information was rooted into the culture of these communities. The uncle would sit near the hearth and would tell all the stories to his nephews and nieces. They would in turn tell these same stories to the next generation.

Later on, news and other communications were transmitted through cane ring symbols. This system is preserved and prevails in the Khasi state of Hima Khyrim, in which news of the commencement of the Nongkrem festival *(Shad Bad Pomblang Khyrim)*, is sent by the Dorbar, through cane rings to all the units *(Raij)* of the state. The interesting fact of it is that the indigenous Hynniewtrep community of Hima Khyrim accepts information only through knotted rings made from bamboo for the commencement of different festivals. Besides this, for war-related news also these kinds of rings were used and their placement on a particular finger denoted the urgency of the message.

"Ka Pyrta Shnong" (town criers) is also another form of transmitting a message and announcement, announcing the commencement of a Dorbar or assembly. For the work, a group of men sets out to different localities accompanied by the beating of a drum. One man would make the announcement with a loud voice about the various activities of the Dorbar. These, therefore, are common practices of the Khasi people. However, in urban areas, this practice is generally fading away due to the development of modern technologies. With the advancement of different modes of communications, the age-old method has been in decline. For the purpose of disseminating their announcements, the newspapers, posters, local cable channels are utilized after paying reasonable rates charged by them. In fact, in 2002, the Nonksheh locality in Upper Shillong area abandoned the old age practice of *"Pyrta Shnong"* because of lack of personnel to make such announcements [10].

ICT and Journalism: Development of Technology

The development in technology has changed the media scenario and even the mode of media coverage. The usage of pens, pencils, notebooks or shorthand is being replaced by electronic equipment in news gathering, recording, transmission and compilation of information. As the proverb questions-Is science a boon or a curse? So also the question arises as to whether technology is a boon or a curse for journalism?

News Coverage

Some journalists of Meghalaya have appreciated technology development in the field of journalism as it enables them to file or send the reports for publication on time. *"For the news coverage, earlier the journalists had to run from pillar to post as there were limited telephone connections. Sometimes the reporters had to walk 7 to 8 miles to cover an event as road connectivity was bad in most areas. At times, the news would appear in the newspapers after 2-3 days of the actual event whereas now news is instantly updated with the help of technology,"* says Syndor Singh Syiem, Editor, *"U Peitgnor."* In a lot of ways, news gathering is much easier and faster. In present situation, the flow of information is very fast; anything that takes place anywhere reaches the desk in a fraction of a second. Photos can be sent by mobile phone immediately either by reporters or sometimes by the public. Similar to which Mugo [7] stated that the telephone has bridged the time between the reporter and the source, reporter and editor, saving costs such as travel logistics as news can be reported from any location to any given point of time. Still, cost is one of the immediate impacts of ICTs on news gathering, as the cost of gathering news has drastically and significantly reduced with the advent of information and communication technologies.

Citizen journalism also plays a role in this regard as the concerned citizen tries to reach the journalists to report an event. This is possible because of the presence of ICT and internet facilities in mobile handsets.

However, though there are many advantages of having technological development, there are also certain disadvantages to be seen. Now, everyone is getting the stories as it has become like a clone, the stories are shared and this is the reason that people these days do not buy too many newspapers. If they buy one newspaper, they do not like to buy another, as they get the same kind of news in almost all the newspapers of the state. *"Before the reporters used to hunt for news, now for varied reasons such as low wages and no travel or daily allowance, the reporters share their news. Therefore, there is hardly any kind of exclusive news coverage in Meghalaya,"* says M. Sameer Sohliya, Correspondent, *"The Sentinel."*

Printing Technology

Printing technology is another area which has improved tremendously in Meghalaya. There was a time when the newspapers distributed in Meghalaya were handwritten. With the introduction of the printing press, the development of the press also advanced.

This difference can be measured in terms of presentation, the layout of the paper, etc. Prior to 1980, many of the print media had been brought out in letter presses and published as weekly issues. From letter press, this switched over to linotype, the electronic typewriter. After the introduction of the electronic typewriter, the trend of the print media changed to a daily, like *U Rupang, Mawphor, U Nongsain Hima, U Peitgnor*, and the recently introduced paper *Kynjatshai.* However, now the vernacular weekly newspapers are very few in the market.

This development made it easily feasible and economically viable to print more multi-edition copies faster at a lesser cost, which enabled the press to cater to more readers stationed at different locations. The transport system, which is also another form of technological development, had facilitated news reporting from near and far places. This had also helped in quick transmission and dissemination of news which led to a wider circulation of the newspapers.

Design and Layout

The designing and layout of the newspaper add attractiveness to the presentation of the papers. However, the layout of the newspaper is not that good as the national papers. *"In most cases, there is an artist who usually does the layout designing but in local newspapers sometimes the reporters themselves and sometimes the people who do the separation of colors do the layout, who actually do not know the art but know the techniques of arranging the object in the software, whereas in national papers this is done by the artist,"* says Syndor Singh Syiem.

News on Web

The press now is going through a drastic change as the electronic media has compelled the print media to adapt new technologies, with a more professional outlook and sensitivity to the market forces.

This development in the field of journalism is also seen in the state of Meghalaya, which has brought a new trend of online news portal which is also a form of ICT journalism. The news of recent events is updated in the websites which can be accessed from every nook and corner of the world. This has become especially handy in places where transportation becomes a problem which adds to the difficulty in distribution leading to the availability of "stale news." Here, the alternative way a person prefers is to get news at the earliest through the use of the internet either by using a mobile phone or a computer; this is another advantage that technology has afforded us. However, unlike newspapers which give detailed information about the news and events, in online websites, due to lack of space the news and information is composed of only important information. One advantage of the online website is that people can access the updated news in real time, updating breaking news and events as they happen, which differentiates itself from the traditional newspapers. Starfing Pdahkasiej, the owner of SP News Agency has given his opinion about the impact and the changing environment of electronic media as, *"There was a time when a person could not read and write, he was called illiterate, while at this age when a person cannot operate a computer he is called illiterate. When people have more information in themselves that*

is the power they have." This has rightly described the current situation where online news and the growth of ICT has affected the people in their day to day life.

The newspapers which are popular among the readers have realized this importance and they have also started uploading the whole content of their newspapers on the web. This has proven to be one of the quickest ways to communicate on a large scale in a split second. Producing news online has created better opportunities for the newspapers as this is the best way to compete with broadcast journalism in providing breaking news timely. In India, *The Hindu* under the editorship of N. Ravi was the first newspaper to come up with the online news in the year 1995.

In Meghalaya, most of the newspapers have also launched their online e-papers which also help in earning revenue from the advertisements that are aired. This e-paper is uploaded in the website after the layout of the newspaper is done. Few among them are *The Shillong times, The Meghalaya Guardian, Meghalaya Times, The Mawphor, U Nongsain Hima,* and *Achik songbad.*

Besides, there are also true online-only papers, which do not have any hard copy versions. An example of this is the independent web-only newspapers that were introduced in Meghalaya namely *Oh Meghalaya* and *SP News Agency.*

Oh! Meghalaya

The website was inaugurated on the 1st of August 2012. The main person behind the website is a senior journalist of the state named Tilak Rai who started *Oh! Meghalaya*, as a source of online news. Besides, it pertains to tourism website which attempts to showcase Meghalaya to the outside world. The website is also empaneled with the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of India. This is the first news website in the state where the latest events and information are updated in real time. Presently, the website has more than 9 lakh visitors. The management includes both the professionals and trainees with the IT experts.

SP News Agency (Starfing Pdahkasiej News Agency)

SP News Agency was established in 2009 as a news provider to various news organizations of Meghalaya. The editor and the owner, Starfing Pdahkasiej, had initiated the agency with the motive of starting his own online news website which however came into being on 29th October 2012. The website is government recognized and presently the total number of visitors of the website has crossed over 13 lakh on 29th October 2013. Despite having a good number of visitors of the website, the agency was not able to draw good profits and revenue due to the lack of industries, etc.

Future of ICT

In the next couple of months, the press (print and electronic) from Meghalaya is hoping to be in a good shape, as the government of Meghalaya is taking initiative to introduce the advertisement policy. *"Before this advertisement policy covered only the print media of Meghalaya, however, the recent amendment of the policy has also included the electronic media where both the broadcasting and online websites would also be benefited. Besides this, by 2016 the government of India has taken the initiative to provide internet facilities to all the villagers which will give more power to the people,"* says Starfing Pdahkasiej. In Meghalaya, Wi-Fi facilities will be installed in all the colleges and schools. Therefore, all these technological developments will accelerate the online news websites to a point where updated news will reach each and every individual in the region.

Conclusion

ICT can play a major role in the overall development of the state and nation as a whole. The transmission of first newspaper, *Achikni Ripeng* in a handwritten form to that of online news portal has given a new arena for the people of the region.

Though the information technology has the power to deliver news to different corners of the world, it also has its characteristics if not used within proper framework can take to a different course as technology alone cannot solve the problems and fill the gaps of knowledge and perceptions. Besides, even the practice of old traditional customs of disseminating news and information (cane rings, *Ka Pyrta Shnong* and *Pyrta Shnong*) has declined and has been replaced by the latest technological development. Therefore, if the prospect of ICT has emerged for

the overall development in the region, it has also faded the conventional aspect of our society.

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