ONLINE JOURNALISM IN CONVERGENCE ERA

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Abstract

Online journalism is growing because of internet penetration and flexibility it has. It can host multi-media content. Online journalism is non-linear in nature. Navigation of the web page depends on readers or viewers interest. Online stories have to be written with clarity of thought and expression. Online stories sentence and paragraphs should be short, so that it will be easy to understand and retain. Word press can help in creating free websites. In Online content, photos, info-graphs, videos, written content, music or voice over etc can be skillfully incorporated. Online journalism allows content to be uploaded by anyone without editing. Media laws and ethics can be compromised. So, online journalists must be trained. Journalists can upload content from anywhere and anytime. Online content can also be accessed from anywhere, anytime, and in any form. It is interactive in nature. Online content can be archived and retrieved at our own convenience.

Key Words: Convergence, Online, Multi-media content, Word press, Convergence and Artificial Intelligence, editing online stories, Podcast, Info-graphics, Blogging, Online story telling.

Introduction

Online journalism uses world wide web as its platform to present its content. Online journalism can publish its content in real time. It can update breaking news and events as they happen anywhere in the world. Content presentation and updating in Online journalism from around the world is much easy comparing to traditional journalism. It needs less logistics. Its distribution cost is cheap and instantly available to the readers. Online publications can use shifted time. Online publications can publish and archive content for viewing instantly or later. Online multi-media comprises of: text, graphics, sound, music, motion, video, animation, 3D etc. Nature of Online Journalism is interactive. Hyper-links in the web pages leads to another set of web pages with information.

In Online Journalism, television, radio, and other forms of new media interact. Convergence within Journalism has changed the way Journalist use Internet. Immediacy of Online Journalism, if internet connection is available, news can be uploaded instantly. Internet facilitates the Process, Production, Storing, Retrieval, and Presentation of news

Skills and knowledge needed for Online Journalism are much more than traditional Journalism. The internet provides a platform for various forms of news content--- text,

photos, videos, information graphics etc. Depending on the targeted readers and audience, reporters use different types of content formats to narrate their stories. Content is packed in such a way that readers or audience are engaged and motivated to consume it. One of the advantages of online Journalism is, content can be posted in multiple formats.

Given the nature of online journalism, a career in Online Journalism needs myriad skills. You not only need to conceptualize a story but also package it to make it interesting to read or watch. For that, an aspirant need to hone writing skill, get mastery over photography, videography and specific dedicated soft wares. One should also have an idea of designing attractive reader-friendly web pages and methods of posting content online.

People working in Online Journalism need to cultivate a habit of working in teams. As a single person will not have the skills needed to package a story to be posted on the internet. So, professionals working in Online Journalism needs to extract work from other departments to complete a task.

The online story is not uploading a news article to a Web site with a photo accompanying it. It contains at least one story in text format (may also include sidebars). It may include single photos or photo galleries, one or more videos or audio clippings, information graphics and other visual elements to enrich the story.

Online journalism is continuously updated from time to time, as news happens. Nowadays reporters carry a camera to shoot events on the spot and upload to the site instantly. As there is intense competition among media houses to break stories first.

Special stories need lot of time to create as it needs cooperation from various departments. Creativity is used to present the story visually rich to motivate the readers or viewers to go through it. Specialists in various fields have to come together to create content for online media. Online media has unlimited news hole. So, in-depth and comprehensive coverage of news events can be done. Researching a story needs a lot of time to be done.

Print media, T.V and Radio are evolved over many decades. They went through many innovations to come to present versions. Formats for them are evolved, and more or less became standard all over the world. On the contrary, online media is evolving every day. New technology is being introduced for reporting, editing, presenting and posting content every other day. Online media is re-calibrating itself to changing times to be relevant. Standardization of news formats for web is yet to take place. Internationally, accepted guidelines for creating online content is still far from complete. Content generation technology is developing very fast and is yet to get stabilized.

Online media is audio and visual in nature. It has to compete with other media platforms. One significant advantage of Online media is interactivity. Readers or viewers can browse their interested content from anywhere, at any time and any form.

Types of Multi-Media Content

Each variety of multi-media content format has certain advantages and disadvantages for readers or viewers. So, depending on the content, the editor decides the format to be adopted

to upload content, so that readers or viewers engaged shall go through the content with effortless ease.

Podcast: It is easy to record and distribute it among the listeners. It can be recorded spontaneously, or a script can be written, it can be recorded in a studio or a mobile app and publish it to reach listeners instantly. Through music effects and voice modulation, listeners can be enticed to the podcast. Another advantage is that it can be herd on our mobile app or iPod etc time and again. Listeners can be engaged easily. Not much internet data is consumed. All the subjects under the Sun, can be discussed and posted as Podcasts.

Text format stories: Generally, this format is very popular and easy to develop and publish. Stories can be identified and written to make internet viewers enticed. Sidebars can be included to add in-depth information to the main text. Photo gallery can be added to make the text interesting. Info-graphics can also be integrated to explain the issue discussed in a simple way. Facts and figures can be built-in to make it authentic and knowledge-intensive. Videos and audios can be incorporated to make the story live and interesting. By using content formats suitable to platforms appealing to the internet, viewers make websites popular. Background information and analysis can be provided. Text can introduce a topic, summarize and present content in meaningful way. Text stories provide background information to the main story. Text format is usually used from time immemorial to share information. Text stories can be understood easily by the common man. Editing text plays crucial in making the text understandable. Depending on target viewers editing of the content has to be done.

Photos: Internet is an audio-visual media. Photo is a visual media. A picture speaks more than thousands of words. It is very useful in communicating with the common man as it crosses the language barrier. Photos lure viewers as they offer a visual feast. If audio is added to these photos and video is made, no doubt it motivates viewers to go through it. Photos stir emotions. If appropriate photos are published relevant to the topic, they can create magic. Photos can set the mood to a topic and location. Not only in print media, but photos also capture sensitive moments and facial expressions more vividly and efficiently on the internet too. Photos connect with readers, give more human touch. Text and photos together with designing of a web page can entice the viewer.

On online websites, photo galleries can be created for viewers. Through creativity, a story can be narrated using slideshows, wherein photos are used in slideshows. Captions are written in slides to view them. The online platform gave freedom for ordinary people to exhibit their creativity, knowledge and skill. Photos can capture moments of life. The web has provided platforms to showcase the work of professional photographers. Disadvantages of photos: With the help of software photos can be morphed and faked. They sometimes lack context. Stories can't always be told effectively due to the gathering of photos out of context. Furthermore, photos lack credibility.

Videos: Today's generation is growing with videos. Videos are made for all subjects and all seasons. With the advent of internet democratization of media took place. Anybody with a mobile can make a video and share it on social media. Advantages: Video is an audio-visual media. Voice can also be recorded to a video. It looks natural to capture a scene. Video impresses the viewer than a photo. Because of powerful mobile features, mobile journalism and citizen journalism have become popular. These days many free video-editing soft wares

are available to edit a raw video. Sometime back, media was not accessible to common man. Now, social media is accessible to common man, who owns a smartphone. YouTube, Face book, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram etc. act as a social media platform to ordinary people. Many digital news channels use text, podcasts and videos mainly. The Print, The Wire, The Quint and The Scroll etc. are popular Indian Web news channels. Many individuals irrespective of caste, creed, religion and gender have started news channels on various topics under the Sun. Disadvantage: To shoot and edit a video is time- consuming. Info-graphics: To explain complex issues, info-graphics are used in media. So, the readers or viewers can easily understand. Graphs and charts are used to simplify text and grasp quickly. Readers or viewers, instead of reading text or viewing the video, go through info-graphics. Comparing information for many years can be easily explained with info-graphics. Usually, Adobe Flash is used to create interactive info-graphics.

Supporting text: It knits different elements of a story package together into a cohesive whole. Content developers should provide photo/video credits, captions to photographs or drawings, names of pictures and headlines. Supporting text should connect distinct elements of the package. Formatting of the text should be done in such a way that it should motivate the readers to read. Elements of the page should be arranged keeping in view layout of the page. Word press: It can be used to create a free site for all kinds of subjects. It can be customized for news sites. It can also be used to develop blogs. It can be created for all types of languages. Its architecture is simple and customized depending on our needs. One can sign up; create a domain name, username and password. After creating an account, a Dashboard helps in setting options for your site. News content can be uploaded into the site. Photos and videos can be added to our site. Inexpensive cameras can be used to take photos and videos; free soft wares can be used to edit them. Text can be written and edited in free soft wares.

Blogging: Blog is an Online Journal. It is a Website, where items are posted on regular basis in reverse chronological order. People can create their own blog and post their comments. There is no gatekeeping and filters for bloggers. There are various types of blogs.

Online Storytelling: It is a concept used to develop content and distribute to targeted audience.

Stories can be told in various formats. They are Audio stories, Narrative stories, Live chats, Quizzes and surveys, animated stories, Interactive webcasts and Multimedia interactives etc.

Exploring online and offline resources: We are living in the information age. Search for information is only click away on the internet. Any information we wanted can be retrieved from Web in seconds. Articles published in newspapers are linear. They generally follow one subject after another in a single coherent path. Web pages are non—linear. In a Web page, links are incorporated to other sites, where information distantly related to the subject is also linked. A reporter or editor should be focused; otherwise, there is a possibility of getting derailed and spending on irrelevant topic. "Specific" relevant words have to be used to retrieve information about our interest. Government and commercial Databases have to be searched for retrieving information. Depending on our topic, offline resources like published material can be used as a reference. In-depth journalism is "explanatory" in nature. Online journalism provides unlimited news hole. Complex issues can be simplified. Specifics of any issues can clearly explain.

Internet, a Journalist tool

Websites: Journalist can use internet for exploring websites pertaining to different types of reporting. For information, journalists can visit Reporters without Borders, Poynter institute, International Federation of Journalists, International Freedom of Expression Exchange etc.
Databases: Various data bases like Wikipedia, Microsoft Encarta, Encyclopaedia of Britannica etc. can be accessed by Journalists for information.

Experts: Journalism Net and ProfNet are sources for expert advice from all over the world.

Figures and Statistics: National and International organization's websites can be approached for figures and statistics. Word dictionaries, Style guides, Quotations, Translators, Maps and other information can be accessed on Internet. Various Search engines and meta-search engines can be used to access information on Internet.

Conducting Online Interviews: Due to the availability of technology, conducting online interviews has become easy. Accessibility to the internet and devices like mobile apps, voice recorders and portable cameras etc. Has made conducting interviews effortless. Now interviews can go "Digitally live" on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook or using apps like Open Broadcasting Soft wares (OBS), Zoom and Cisco WebEx etc.

Writing and editing online stories: As we discussed earlier, Web is a non-linear medium. When we land up to read a story on the home page, apart from the story we want to read, we also come across hyperlinks leading to other stories. On the home page, links are provided based on categories. Depending on the reader's interest, they can choose a story and drive- in. Sometimes teasers are also provided in the form of words in the paragraph. Teasers drive us to a news story on the web. Reporters and sub-editors also provide URLs below the story— today's readers or in a hurry and lack patience. So, headlines to a story should be attention-grabbing, to the point, concise and informative.

A headline must pull the reader by informing the reader about the story. So, an informative headline with strong verbs and highlighting the story should be written by the editor. As the news hole in online journalism is unlimited, a story can be probed in-depth. As many sidebars can be added. Useful hyper-links can be given. Usually, Online readers wish to read news stories comprehensively. If information is given, the readers wouldn't hesitate to go deeper. Web has empowered the public, it has totally changed the way they get information and contribute. Audience are involving in contributing content to the online platforms and they are in control of the content.

Writing process for Online Story: Writing in non-linear form requires a different way of planning, organizing and crafting a story. For any medium, writing stories involves, planning, gathering, organizing and writing and re-writing. On the contrary, Online news requires certain unique elements to writing for the Web. For any major Online Media Website, involves a team -- a writer, an editor and technical staff---including a multimedia specialist.
Online stories need hyperlinks to Web pages. They also contain multimedia elements, such as audio or video, accompanying a story. It may also contain visual elements like maps, photos, etc. Web stories might also involve discussions and interactive platforms. Web editors, designers, multimedia specialist will also be a part of developing a story.

Online storytelling in nonlinear and the process involved is deconstructing and reconstructing. Dividing the story into components pieces, then finding the similarities and relationship within the components parts and grouping them is deconstructing. Further, using a storyboard to diagram the relationships between the grouping is reconstructing a story.

Good writing attracts good readers. Content dictates the style. Inverted Pyramid style helps the scanners. Writers should entice the readers by writing in short paragraphs, writing sub-heads and listing the components will facilitate the readers in scanning the write up. Information should be broken into sub-topics and knit nonlinear parts. Though Web has unlimited space, readers don't have unlimited attention. So, every unnecessary word, conjunction and adjective should be cut.

Good journalism is Identification, selection, collection and presentation of information. It is imaginative, sensitive and skilful. It could be taxing and challenging. Online journalism is unique medium. It is multi-dimensional and user-driven. Journalism is finding news worthy information, events, facts, opinion and experiences to the readers. All the information gathered should be checked for accuracy and relevance. A journalist should always provide valuable and exciting information to the readers. A good journalist should be an ace researcher and reporter. A good editor should construct the news story and publish it on the web.

As Leslie Sellers remarks in his invaluable text, The Simple Subs Book (1968):

'. . . over-long sentences are death to readability. They are usually of involved construction, and involved sentences have to be read twice to get their full meaning . . . Nothing that cannot be absorbed in first reading ought to appear in a newspaper. However, night after night and week after week these jigsaw puzzles get into print.'

According Craig, Online Journalist and Content development: Guidelines for Good Journalists: i) Reporting objectively ii) Writing in a way so as to arouse interest in the readers iii) Using relevant photographs iv) Incorporating video and audio wherever it is needed. Stretching the medium: Exploiting the strength of the medium. Immediacy, Interactivity, Multimedia and depth. Deconstruct, reconstruct and Storyboard. Technology should be used wherever it is necessary. Should incorporate whatever is necessary for strengthening the story. Otherwise, it becomes a visual noise.

Content should be targeted at a segment. Usually, segmentation comes under the influence of the story's characteristics, the reader's interest and priorities. The delivery of the platform should also be taken into consideration. Online readers want the non-linear structure of news presented on a web page. Readers want news at any time and any place.

Jakob Nielson (1999) offers specific rules to be followed for writing on the web:1) Be concise2) Use hyper-text 3) Write for scan ability 4) Use plain language and Pyramid Structure Generally, readers skim and scan the web page. So, headlines and text should grab the attention of the readers. Readers are impatient, so we should put the information to the point. Readers have to be hooked with an interesting lead. Headlines should be written in simple language and informative. In web pages, links for additional information can be provided.

Crawford Kilian emphasizes the importance of 'hooking an impatient visitor . . . Young readers are skimming and scanning, so use both headlines and text to grab them.' His advice is: Make headlines simple and informative; use quotation marks in text because people seem to prefer what someone said; include questions, as they make us seek the answer; include unusual statements, as readers love to be surprised; include the 'promise of conflict – we love fights'; use news pegs 'to tie content to the coat-tails of some big current event'; and address the reader directly.

According to Hall, Editing online stories: Online stories have to be edited for accuracy of the story, figures, photos, videos, grammar, spelling, structure, choice of words etc. Formatting of the page has to be done. If photo galleries and multiple videos are used, formatting may take some time. After editing, previewing of the page has to be done. Otherwise, mistakes might crop in.

An editor has to assure him or her/self that: Edited copy should be clean and devoid of spelling mistakes of names, institutions or words etc. Headlines of a story are informative, precise and invoke readers' interest. Captions of the photos and credits are appropriately placed and correctly spelt. Page layout is correctly done. All visual elements are correctly placed. Online pages must be adaptable to multiple platforms and could be opened in all types of browsers.

Media convergence is the process of gathering and dissemination of news across a multi‑‑‑media platforms. Media convergence: Text+ Photos+ Audio +Video+ Graphics =Multimedia Convergence within Journalism: Convergence in media is happening at many levels. Convergence within newsroom, within content, within the way information is collected, and within the way news is disseminated.

Newsroom convergence: Journalist from different media (T.V.Radio, Newspaper and Online) share same workspace, attend the same meetings and plan presentation of news together, depending on the platform editors plan their presentation of news.

Newsgathering convergence: Reporters, Photojournalists and editors from different media platforms collaborate on news story. They gather news story from their professional angle and share among various media platforms.

Content convergence: The final covered story is presented in multimedia form—combining text, images, audio, video, blogs, podcasts, slideshows etc. Content management systems are created by media companies that are storing content in various digital formats and delivering content easily to different platforms. Innovations in technological are transforming 21st century journalism and promoting Media convergence.

Flexible delivery platforms: Online news content can be delivered through SMS alerts, email alerts and RSS feed etc.

Journalism and Artificial Intelligence

Graefe (2016) When news stories are produced automatically by computers instead of human reporters, it is called as automated journalism, algorithmic journalism or robot journalism. By

virtue of AI, the news is interpreted, organized, and presented in human-readable ways. It involves algorithm which processes the huge amount of data. Picks from pre-programmed article structure, places crucial points, and inserts the requirements like names, statistics, figures and the like. Goud and Biswal (2020) AI enables to personalize the media content in order to recommend better to its audience. By the virtue of robot journalism, more and more stories and videos can be incorporated. AI provides technological support to journalists in the age of information overload syndrome.

Prospects and challenges of Online Journalism

Immediacy of the Online environment has given opportunity for everybody on the planet to publish Online. The speed of the internet is made to sacrifice Journalistic ethics and affecting credibility and accuracy. One of the advantages of internet is, reaching millions of viewers instantaneously. In Cyber journalism, credibility and accuracy of information cannot be compromised.

Multi-Skilled: Convergence Journalists need to be multi-skilled. To perform multiple skills, journalists need to get trained. Sometimes a report has to act like a photo-journalist, video journalist and an editor etc. A Convergence reporter might be writing to newspaper, editing a video to TV and filing a brief to Web simultaneously. Because of ever changing media landscape, a convergent journalist has to be familiar with various forms of storytelling.

From Gatekeeping to Gate watching: Gatekeeping is selection of news. Traditional media houses follow gatekeeping. Social media has no gatekeeping, anybody can publish online content. So, in Online Journalism gate watching is practiced. What type of content is published in various platforms is carefully watched.

Ethical and legal challenges: Accuracy, Corrections of errors, Copyrights act has to be followed and never plagiarize. Identify the sources and link to news sources ethically. Online journalists should be sensitive to others privacy. Content of photos and videos should never be distorted, if changes made attribution must be made. Always factual information and commentary must be clearly mentioned. Advocacy, commentary and facts must be differentiated. News and opinion should be clearly labeled in Online journalism. Internet is an interactive medium. So, whether viewers should be allowed to publish material or not should be thought carefully.

Media law and Ethics: Now-a-days news on web spreads far and wide. In India Online Journalism websites have to work with in Information Technology Act, 2000. Content on the web has to follow laws like I.P.C, Cr.P.C, Defamation, Obscenity Act, and Misrepresentation of Women Act. Code of Journalistic Ethics has to be followed by the digital journalists. Digital journalists have to uphold ethics like objectivity, accuracy, fairness, credibility etc. Competition among the news websites to break a story is putting heavy toll on the media persons.

Digital journalists have to deliver the news with speed. So, there is possibility of accuracy and credibility, fairness etc. getting side-lined. Unless news is verified from credible source, accuracy can't be confirmed. Citizen journalists are very active with their cell phone cameras

and social media handles. News gets posted on Twitter, Face book, Instagram or YouTube etc. faster before journalists' posts news on their website.

Because of social media accessibility to everyone, fake news is spreading faster. There is no gate keeping in social media. So, there is nobody to check the authenticity of the information shared on the social media. Bloggers generally express their opinions and analysis. You tube channels are cropping up innumerably. More opinion and analysis are coming out on social media. Therefore, fairness is a major issue in social media. Common public are active on social media. They are not aware of Media Laws and Journalistic Ethics. Neither are they trained in communication and journalism. They cover a news event from their prospective and post it on social media. No doubt it is strengthening democracy, but ethics are sacrificed. By training citizens' journalist, they can write news objectively as per journalist ethics. Slanting news will lose its credibility.

Conclusion

Online journalism has really brought tectonic shift in the field of journalism. But it is still in its evolving stage. It needs time to get standardized and stabilized. No doubt, varieties of subjects are discussed on web platforms. It has empowered common man and strengthened democracy. Gatekeeping by media houses is no more relevant. With all its advantages, it also has certain disadvantages. Online journalism content has to be regulated with adequate laws, keeping in view freedom of speech.

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