Digital Journalism: Theorizing on Present Times

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A lot of change is happening in the world of journalism with the arrival of digital technology. The journalist in this changed scenario is expected to explore multimedia options. There is also a paradigm shift with readers and viewers now becoming a part of the news making process. Write-ups', pictures, and audiovisual content are increasingly being published by the citizen on websites, blogs, video sharing platforms, and social media. While this has been hailed as democratic and down to top approach, there is a question of credibility. Theories of digital media which have influenced digital journalism have talked about immediacy, interactivity, multimodality, convergence, the broader economic and social factors, the formation of separate networks or reformation of existing networks, a virtual shared platform for communication, actor-network and plurality. However, the question of credibility and the spread of fake news online have raised some new questions. This paper will try to analyze the nature of digital journalism, the various theories which have been applied to explain digital journalism and explain why a new approach is needed in the present scenario.

Keywords: Digital journalism, participative communication, new media, digital media theory, credibility

Digital technology has revolutionized the way news is gathered, compiled, and disseminated. Digital journalism has opened up new possibilities and has thrown up new challenges. Digital journalism is considered to be the future as more and more newspapers in print are facing lesser circulation. Globally, newspapers in print are on a decline except for countries like India, where there is robust growth. The driving force behind digital journalism has been a plurality of voices. Digital journalism gave hope of an alternative media platform where news can be explored from all possible angles. The emergence of digital journalism also signaled the gradual change in the role of the journalist. Now anyone can report on events around them or take pictures and publish them on various digital platforms without needing a gatekeeper to select or reject their content. Journalism is not now limited to journalism professionals; amateurs are also taking up journalistic roles. However, while digital media was expected to be more democratic by creating space for plural voices, in reality, it has led to consolidation and vertical integration. The major dominant players are fast filling up the spaces leaving little space for different ideas to thrive.

The participative nature of digital journalism was a paradigm shift. Options opened for directly getting feedback from the audience on a report. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and weblogs have provided the opportunity to the journalists to share news on their

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accounts and understand the audience response. Stovall (2011) observes that the web is an ideal news medium because of its ability to handle information in most of the formats of traditional media like texts, pictures, graphs, audio, and video. The web provides enhanced capacity. The reporter has the liberty of using as many words and as much time to tell the story. A photographer has the option of posting ten pictures of an event. The web provides the option to include with the reports full text of the speech that they cover, audio of the source and video of the scenes where the story unfolds. The medium offers more flexibility. Information can be shared in the form of words, pictures, audio, video, and graphics. The web can disseminate information in no time and does so with greater variety, expansion, depth, and context. The permanence of the medium also puts it into a different league altogether. Properly archived and maintained data on the web could exist far more than any other tangible medium in the present times.

Kasturi (2018) observes that contrary to the myth, the growth of digital medium doesn't reduce the importance of the journalist. The responsibility of a trained journalist is even more in the online age because they have the expertise to separate the important from the redundant and facts from the rumors that dangerously spread over the online platform. The fundamental skills required also remain the same. The digital medium can only pose a threat to traditional news organizations if they choose not to change with the changing times. Traditional organizations can view the online platform as an opportunity to develop and share content to reach out to a previously untapped audience. A different market is emerging with the revival in readership of long-form journalism through online-only platforms like the 'Big Roundtable.' The digital platform is providing news organizations to expand their reach. Indian Express is reaching more readers as one of the country's fastest-growing digital news companies. Journalists can engage readers, and viewers never like before through chats and conversations, stories on Facebook, Twitter, and Google Hangout. Online links posted on the stories enable readers to verify the source.

Banerji (2018) observes that Twitter is being used by governments, politicians, news agencies, media houses, and journalists themselves to inform people. One media house has made it mandatory for journalists working for the journal to open Twitter accounts and tweet all news-related information from that platform. Journalists' increments are linked to the amount of news they share on WhatsApp groups. The power of Twitter as an effective mode of communication capable enough to shake governments was witnessed in 2011 with the rise of the Arab spring. Several news channels in India regularly feature on their screens tweet by well-known people. Newspapers cover stories based on reactions from people on Twitter. Politicians are effectively using Twitter to make their presence felt among the voters. The tweets are a rich source of information for the journalists to understand their recent ideas on issues. However, stories cannot depend solely on Twitter, and facts need to be differentiated from rumor. The wider reality of the world, which is outside the realm of Twitter, needs to be considered by journalists.

Social media has democratized interactions, and the journalist is no longer safe in the ivory tower of his or her byline away from the people who read or watch the media. Responses from the readers are immediate and at times, hard-hitting. According to Valecha (2018), media houses are tapping on the opportunities available online by securing their place in the social media and digital technology spaces through mobile apps, web platforms like Hotstar and Sony Liv. The growth of digital technology has resulted in TV viewing from social activity to solo activity. Specialized content and short duration format content compatible with the mobile phone is expected to rise. The youth in metropolitan cities are going digital. This has necessitated newspapers to go digital, 'Phygital,' an extension of the

physical newspaper into the digital space. They are launching web portals and mobile apps and are partnering with social media options and third-party news providers like Flipboard and Dailyhunt. While TV and print have their ecosystems in the digital age, they are competing with tech companies, social media, telecom companies, mobile apps, and others for the same set of audience and attention. Content is set to rule in the coming days subject to its compliance with various media options.

New Media and Digital Journalism

Digital journalism is rooted in developments in the realm of new media. Lister (2003) observes that the 'newness' that has been attributed to new media is derived from the modernist belief in social progress as delivered by technology. New media appears to open up new creative and communication horizons. Calling a range of developments as new is part of a powerful ideological movement and a narrative about progress in Western societies. According to Manovich (2001), the cultural language of new media is derived from different ways of seeing and communicating, which is drawn from the prevalence of cinema in the twentieth century. The digital basis of new media requires a new language of computer code. The new media object can be described mathematically and is subject to algorithmic manipulation. Media becomes programmable.

Bolter and Grusin (1999) observe that the presence of immediacy and hypermediacy in new media refashions all previous media forms. Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly (2009) opine that the term new media came into being to capture a sense of change from the 1980s when the world of media and communications began to look quite different. New media is associated with the following social, economic, and cultural change. A shift from modernity to postmodernity, intensifying process of globalization, a replacement of an industrial age of manufacturing by a post-industrial information age and considering multiple aspects of established and centralized geopolitical orders. New media has useful inclusiveness. It refers to new textual experiences, new ways of representing the world, new relations between subjects and media technologies, new experiences of the relationship between embodiment, identity, and community, new conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media and new patterns of organization and production. New media is characterized by computer-mediated communications, new ways of distributing and consuming virtual realities, and a whole range of transformations and dislocations of established media. Some of the major characteristics of new media include digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked, and simulated. Digital media is characterized by the transformation of input data, light and sound waves into numbers. Once the numeral coding is completed, the input data in digital media production can be subjected to the mathematical processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division through algorithms available within the software. Digital doesn't mean conversion of physical data into binary information. It only signifies assigning numeral values to the phenomenon. The principle and practice of digitization become important because it helps in understanding how media texts are dematerialized, how they can be separated from their physical forms like a photographic print, book, a roll of film, etc. It also helps in understanding how data can be compressed into very small spaces, accessed at very high speeds in nonlinear ways and manipulated in easier ways than analog forms.

According to Friend and Singer (2007) internet has threatened the hegemony of established media by creating new storytelling possibilities and ushering in a degree of practical reality to the ideal of journalism as a public conversation. The Internet has

empowered anyone with a computer to create a media outlet with the possibility of reaching to an audience of millions. The web formats interactive capability has been the driving force of the new media landscape. It has to lead to passionate, public conversations among diverse voices and perspectives and has initiated the return of point-of-view style of news writing. In web-based journalism, many are taking greater advantage of technologies capabilities. With the growth in the audience for online news, advertising revenue has picked up. People are getting more and more news online, and the outlets are not always from traditional news providers. By 2005 Yahoo! News equaled and in some months overtook news leaders CNN.com and MSNBC.com as the most used online news site. The growing increase of broadband access has helped in news organizations emphasizing more on multi-media news. The essence of the newsroom is changing, and journalistic culture is evolving to adapt to new technologies, accommodate new organizational structures and user expectations of input into the news-making process.

Keong (2017) studied three news portals in Malaysia and observed that there is an emphasis given to objective journalism. The politicization of objective journalism in Malaysia and the attempt to undermine it points towards the importance of objective journalism and its vital role in ensuring freedom and a democratic environment. The news portals have shown that mainstream media needs to take a serious look at objective journalism. In the digital age, new ways can be explored to enhance objective journalism.

Ziani, Elareshi, and Alrashid (2017) based their study on an online survey conducted by a group of academic staff targeting users of the Open Media Library (OML) group page on Facebook. The results showed that the Arab world had used social media sites like Facebook and Twitter differently. The accessibility of the internet to the users during their efforts and locations has an important role. A deeper understanding of the power of social networks and the use of the platform is needed. They conclude that social media has become an integral part of those using Facebook in the Arab world. Facebook is used for communication with friends and family. Social media has also provided users a virtual world which has provided an avenue to overcome different social and cultural barriers. This has been beneficial for Arab women by helping them to be engaged in different activities.

Pandey (2019) while discussing the digital turn in media and communication studies, observed that in the digitally networked society, everything can be considered a part of the communicative process. A singular media logic cannot define digital media. Human-technology interactions are defining a multiplicity of constructions in place of a singular construction of reality. In present times it is hard to imagine social life without digital technology.

Lingden (2017) observed that research on explicit forms of bottom-up digital activism in various forms like uprisings, revolutions and protests has revealed that digital tools and platforms can be used successfully to challenge, provoke and overthrow existing power structures. Internet and social media can create a network of resistance. Digital media has challenged traditional forms of political representation. The various movements that emerged around 2010 as the Arab Spring, Indignados anti-austerity movement in Spain and worldwide Occupy protests against social and economic equality have few things in common. They ignore political parties; distrust the mainstream news media, do not recognize traditional forms of leadership, and reject formal organizations. Many of these movements started in social media.

According to Atton (2008), alternative media forms are considered to be more democratic, and people need not be professionals to contribute. There is the belief that

alternative media projects lead to denaturalization of the media. Those who were only audiences of media can now become producers of the media. There is participation in media production and social inclusiveness. This, which Atton feels is the celebration approach to alternative media, claims that the political value of alternative media can be demonstrated by the organizational methods, political parties, self-management, and participation. However, he opines that the celebration approach is a problem because it does not throw light on how alternative media connects to other aspects of social and cultural life. The independence of alternative media does not guarantee exposure or circulation. The value and purpose of independence become crucial when alternative media ventures into a public sphere which is beyond the micro public in their immediate environment.

In contrast to mainstream media making use of members of elite groups as sources, alternative media incorporates a wide range of voices. The representation of ordinary people in alternative journalism provides a space for voices that have equal right to be heard as the elite groups. There are new ways to look at journalism with the proliferation of alternative media. However, he thinks that it will be inadequate to consider that alternative media is free from the influence of existing practices.

Conboy (2013) feels that digitally driven technological shifts in journalism is occurring within a growing field of critical inquiry. Development of technologies like lightweight digital cameras, smart mobile phones, and portable computers had a two-way influence on journalism. Anyone who possesses these technologies can be a potential reporter from the sight of an incident, and that can be relayed to a worldwide audience online. Professional, institutional journalism is under pressure to match the speed and immediacy of such coverage. These two counter forces set up a claim between amateurism and professionalism. The reports covered and filed by amateurs in platforms like blogs raise a question about their factual correctness and adherence to legal and ethical constraints. There are more professional bindings in institutional journalism, which is lacking in amateur journalism. It is accepted though that journalism is no more the same with the coming of new technologies. They have the potential to redefine the way journalism is done in a democratic setup.

The growth of the digital medium has posed new challenges to the journalists. While discussing on the skills required in the changing scenario Wenger and Potter (2015) observe that news organizations are looking for journalists who have a thorough understanding of the need to provide consumers more ways to access information and more control over the way they do it. Associated Press (AP) has a 1-2-3-4 filing system where first comes the headline which can be shared on Twitter, then a brief synopsis of the story, then the complete story and finally an analytical piece. The multimedia journalism demands that style is changed according to the various forms. There are new words coined now like "podcast" thousands of which are now available online. Twitter quickly came up as a newsgathering and dissemination tool. In online medium internet, user can access the information at their convenient time. Innovation needs to be incorporated in the way text is shared, and broadcast is done. Ward (2002) while pointing out the distinctive nature of online journalism observes that are distinct ways employed for online researching and reporting. The online journalist has a powerful new tool in the form of analysis of a large amount of data for trends, discrepancies, and other results. As a publishing medium online can open new ways of dissemination of information and build a dynamic relationship with the reader. According to Niblock (2011), the internet has to lead to huge fundamental changes to journalism. Rapid development in technology is leading to changes in the way

news is gathered and disseminated. The high-speed journey is a new development for the profession. The future of journalism is multi-platformed and multi-skilled. The internet is at the center stage of newsrooms of worldwide broadcasters and newspapers and journalists have to devise new ways to work.

Journalists working for local and regional newspapers have their copy published to the web, and then the copy is printed in the newspaper. Cost effective nature of websites and its popularity among netizens provide an opportunity to major news brands as they have an established loyal audience. Online journalism is about versatility and interactivity. There are news aggregators like Google News, which provide an index of stories which are collated from innumerable sites worldwide. Weblogs have transformed the news consumer to the news producer. Blogs add openness and critical debate to reporting but also lead to unverified information in the public domain. They have blurred the lines between journalism and activism.

There are micro-blogs like Twitter, which many journalists feel have huge potential for discovering breaking stories and carrying out interviews. They also have huge potential for instant polls and as a potential source to develop a story. Informed and experienced journalistic judgment can weed out the ethical and legal concerns. Podcasts which publish and broadcast audio online opens up possibilities for citizen journalists to intervene in journalistic discourse. Hyperlocality is an interesting development that has happened with online digital media. It refers to news coverage of community-level events which normally mainstream media ignore unless they have mass appeal. Hyperlocality is significant because media scholars have raised concerns about globalized media corporations threatening local coverage. However, while many are hailing these developments as the driving force behind democratization of the top-down news delivery system, others think that journalistic standards are compromised. There are concerns regarding untrained citizens turning into reporters.

The positive future of digital journalism can be ensured if journalists and citizens can unravel the real picture under the veil of technological determinism. The future of journalism appears to be a mix of global and local and bottom-up in contrast to the dominant top-down structure prevailing over traditional mass communication. There is the possibility of having greater checks and balances on mainstream sources. News is available free over the digital platform, which is going to have an impact on traditional media. Good journalism has been the priority and will continue to be the priority. Pavlik (2001) thinks that networked new media has the potential to transform journalism because it is interactive, on-demand, and customizable. There is the scope to build communities based on shared interests and offer greater reportorial depth, texture, and content, which is not to be found in other mediums. Ihlstrom (2005) states that e-newspaper will replace the printed version in the long run.

Theories of Digital Media Impacting Digital Journalism

According to Siapera and Veglis (2012), it is important to understand the sociology of journalism, which views the process as a product of distinct historical, social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances. Online journalism has developed its routines, norms, and practices which shape online news. This includes immediacy, interactivity, and multimodality. Work on convergence can be considered under this theoretical framework. Grounded theory, rarely mentioned in online journalism research has a specific approach to data and analysis. This theory does not begin with any assumptions and seeks to understand online journalism inductively by collecting and analyzing data.

The third strand of theoretical work focuses on new technologies and the relationship between technology, society, and journalism. Since online journalism is dependent on technology, it is important to explore the relationship between technology and society to understand the development of online journalism. Diffusion of Innovation approach of Rogers is considered to be the best-known approach of this theory. A third perspective on the relationship between technology and society is associated with Wiebe Bijker. Applied to online journalism and its relationship to technology, this approach holds that its adoption and the way it is executed are dependent on broader economic and social factors to narrower organizational and professional factors. The present understanding of online digital journalism has been greatly enhanced by these three theoretical perspectives.

One of the widely referred theories while discussing digital media is Manuel Castells 'A Network Theory of Power'. He observes that one of the central characteristics of the network society is that the dynamics of domination and the resistance of domination are dependent on network formation and network strategies of offense and defense. This is done either by forming separate networks or by reforming existing networks. He concludes that communication networks are the fundamental networks of power making in society. Power is concentrated in the hands of few global, transnational media conglomerates, which also simultaneously generate resistance. Schroeder (2018) feels that the ideas propounded by Castells are flawed. There are countries like China, where party-state controls media and Sweden, where there is a dominance of public service media. Such systems limit the power of capitalist media conglomerates. National media systems and nation-states largely decide how media operates and the bounds of the political discourse of resistance.

Hjarvard (2008), while talking about the concept of mediatization, states that media not only plays a role of their determination but also act as an independent institution and provide how other social institutions and actors communicate. Apart from media intervening and influencing the activity of other institutions, it also acts as the virtual shared platform for communication for the other institutions and the actors. He concludes that the interplay between mediatization and globalization leads to complex social and cultural geography where individual, local, national, and global entities can be linked in new ways. Mediatization, according to him, is a modernization process where media contributes to disembodying social relations from existing contexts and re-embedding them according to new social contexts. According to Fidler (1997), in his book Mediamorphosis: Understanding New Media, future lies in understanding the past. He coined the term to describe the transformation of communication media in the wake of the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations. He draws his theory based on Paul Saffo's 30-year rule, where Saffo explains how long it takes for new ideas to be accepted into a culture. In the initial stages, there is little perceived a need, in the second stage, there is increased market penetration, and in the final stage acceptance. According to Fidler, there are some principles of Metamorphosis-coexistence of media forms and their co-evolution, gradual change from old media forms to new media, propagation of dominant traits in various media forms, the survival of different media forms in the changing scenario and why new media needs to be adopted in a widespread manner.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) seeks to capture the complexity of the social world by understanding the relationship between humans and non-humans. This theory has its roots in the sociological study of science but incorporates other objects of study as well as politics, law, technology, and religion. This theory is closely associated with Bruno Latour. Michel Callon and John Law are also associated with the origin of this theory. Schroeder

(2018) observes that actor-network theory has also been applied to the internet. This theory is dominated by the idea that specific local social contexts shape science and technology. This makes generalization difficult about the role of media and technology beyond the individual context.His research into media systems in countries like America, Sweden, India, and China have provided some insights into how online media works.

Accessing the use of digital media for political activism in America and Sweden, he opined that the internet had changed digital activism to some extent. A diverse media environment leads to more personalized political communication. This also leads to the possibility of better-coordinated activism. In these two countries, due to the saturation in the media environment scope of this enhancement has been marginal. However, new media have aided in an incremental extension of political communication. The density of political communication between the political and media elites and the citizen has increased. The social change resulting out of such communication has been mostly availed by the elite sections as they have better access to new technologies. The change that has happened with new media coming into the fray has complemented traditional media rather than constituting a break with them. New media needs to diversify political engagement from both sides to initiate a radical break from the traditional media forms. In Sweden and in United States chances of new digital media making a difference has been limited as the balance of power between political elites and citizen is relatively stable. In these countries, digital media provides the opportunity to issues and groups who have been overlooked by traditional media. While there is hope about diverse and content-rich media environment leading to more political participation and informed citizenry the reverse is also possible. More mediation might not initiate change if the level of involvement remains the same or it declines.

Media becoming more responsive to extreme political forces leads to complications. New media has not been able to extend the agenda much because of limited attention space and lack of major new social forces. There has been diversification and differentiation in form and content, but the impact has been limited. In India and China, there have been interesting findings and observations. China having a party regime is waking up to the new challenges being posed by widespread and intense use of the internet by civil society. There has been a tension between how to enable Chinese citizen to participate more via digital media and at the same time, how to manage dissent or questions about the regime's legitimacy. They are trying to balance between not overtly curbing public opinion and trying to keep the party's core interests intact. In India, strong growth projected for smartphones brings into consideration the important role of the internet. Civil society is mostly unconstrained, but strong elites tend to monopolize development towards the development of businesses and parties. Fragmented pluralism provides space for several civil society groups to raise their voice against the dominant interests and corruption. However, in both countries, these civil society pressures include intolerant populist forces. In India, a pluralist political and media environment will lead to increased online activism. In China, such development will be more controlled by an authoritarian regime. In both countries, online civil society is leading to lively politics. The impediment lies in the regime in China and the elite-dominated civil society in India. Schroeder concludes that in China and India, online media will be the main alternative to a media system which is dominated by deeply entrenched political power.

Conclusion

Digital journalism has indeed changed the way news is produced and the way it reaches the audience. It's no more restricted to writing a report or reporting it live from the spot. More and more organizations now seek multimedia journalism. A popular twenty four hour news channel is expected to have a robust presence on the internet as well. The main essence of journalism remains the same. Factually correct reports find acceptance and the credibility of a well-established media house is an added advantage.

The existing theories of digital media impacting journalism talk about convergence, participative down to top nature, the grounded theory of inductively understanding online journalism, diffusion of innovation approach, broader economic and social factors, network theory of power, mediatization, metamorphosis, and actor-network. Theories of mass media like agenda setting is very relevant while discussing digital journalism as well. The plural and relatively democratic platform of online media can be used by big business organizations and different groups to set the agenda for the citizen. As agenda setting is not about reality but the reality filtered and shaped by media, digital journalism can construct reality and use the interactive space to build a public narrative. This has its advantages when there is a social change involved. However, a constructed reality done with a hidden agenda can lead to a discourse which harms the social fabric. In the agenda setting, media also concentrates on a few issues and subjects as important. This leads the citizen to perceive those issues as more important than the rest.

While the internet provides the opportunity to cover news which is normally ignored by mainstream media, there is also the possibility of online media concentrating on a few issues as important. There are viral posts over social media which are considered important and are taken up by digital journalists as well. While digital journalism holds the prospect to be interactive and plural, there is a growing concern of credibility in the wake of fake news spreading through websites, blogs, and social media. The biggest advantage of digital media is that the audience can create content and actively take part in the news making process. This, as it has been felt lately, has dangerous consequences as well. Fake videos uploaded on youtube, fake news shared over social media is leading to social tension. This situation demands a new approach to digital journalism.

Present theories need to be considered in the wake of impending danger. Governments are coming up with new methods to control the spread of false information. This is not the ideal solution because it can be used to control plural voices and to curb the free flow of information. New theories of digital journalism can help understand and find out ways and means to analyze the dissemination of misinformation over the online platform. These theories can give indications for digital journalism to build up a proper response to its imminent threats in this changing media scenario.

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