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Social Media a Powerful tool of communication: A case study of use of social media by citizen journalists

¹Ms.Neelu Sharma,²Dr. Sridhar Krishnaswami

¹Research Scholar, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, SRM University,
Kattankulathur Campus

²Deputy Dean & Professor, Dept. of Journalism and Mass Communication, Faculty of Science and
Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India

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Abstract:

Social Media is a term used to describe the type of media that is based on creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks using web based technologies –Wikipedia

For almost two decades Web has transformed and changed the way information is stored, published, searched and consumed. The effect has been wide and has influenced almost all spheres of life impacting not just business and industries but also Politics, education, media, healthcare transcending geographies and cultural boundaries.

The great wave of web innovation since Google in 1998 has been in social media. Social media is about networking and communicating through text, video, blogs, pictures, status updates on sites such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn or microblogs such as Twitter.

What makes social media of particular interest to journalism is how it has become influential as a communication and news-breaking tool. Social media has played a significant role in recent outbreaks of social protest and resistance. The mushrooming of Occupy protests, the Arab Spring, the mobilization of resistance against the Government of the Ukraine or in Hong Kong was heavily dependent on the resources provided by the social media. Many observers have concluded that in a networked world social media possesses the potential to promote public participation, engagement and the process of democratizing public life. The role of participatory and social media in Iran and during Mumbai attacks in 2008 have caused New York academic and blogger Jeff Jarvis to argue that 'the witnesses are taking over the news', that we are witnessing a historic shift of control from traditional news organisations to the audience themselves.

This paper focuses on the role of social media as a tool by the citizens as a powerful tool of communication.

Key words: Media, Social media, Communication tool, citizen journalism

Introduction:

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Rise of Social Media as a powerful tool of communication

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Social media has been adopted as a significant source by professional journalists, and conversely, citizens are able to use social media as a form of direct reportage. Social media content now forms a significant part of the digital content generated every day, and provides a platform for voices that would not reach the broader public through traditional journalistic media alone.

Social Media as The Fifth Estate: If the press is the Fourth Estate, William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute termed social media as the emergence of the Fifth Estate. Dutton further said “we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks which can act independently of the traditional media. Highly networked individuals (helped by new platforms like social networking and messaging) can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions, Social Media therefore can be undoubtedly termed as Fifth estate

Theoretical Framework

Social Media Marketing

Today, technology is driving the world, it has transformed business and marketing strategies enormously and the change is evident across the stream. The offshoot of it is the Social media platform that has opened avenues for companies and retailers broadening their marketing campaigns to a wider range of consumers. Social media forms the best method of suggestive selling in the times when the user switches to social media to relax and connect. Social media is the most powerful and cost effective marketing and branding tool and platform that ensures the most expressive and truthful. It has wider and direct reach across the world.

“According to Lazer and Kelly’s (1973) Social media marketing is defined "concerned with the application of marketing knowledge, concepts, and techniques to enhance social as well as economic ends. It is also concerned with the analysis of the social consequences of marketing policies, decisions and activities." [i]

Social media marketing works on the concept of using existing social media sites like Face book, twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, Flickr, Ibibo, etc. and selling the products it’s a win win to both the social media which offers free service and gains money through the advertisements of the companies. At the same time the youth get to see e marketing sites online while they are on leisure at social media sites and browse the web sites and shop.

“Barefoot and Szabo (2010) define social media marketing as use of social media channels to promote a company and its products. They believe social media marketing comprises of the traditional web-based promotion strategies, including email newsletters and online advertising.” [ii]

“Robert and Kraynak (2008) explain the social media is changing the role of the customers into advertisers and marketers of the company. Customers can create positive or negative pressure, according to their experience of the companies’ product and services. [iii]”

Chi (2011) defines social media marketing as a “connection between brands and consumers, [while] offering a personal channel and currency for user centered networking and social interaction.”[iv].

“Weinberg (2009) has defined social media marketing as the process that empowers individuals to promote their websites, products, or services through online social channels and tap into a much larger community that may not have been available via traditional channels”

Kietzmann et al (2011) in their paper, building blocks for social media ‘, present a framework that defines social media by using seven functional building blocks: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. As different social media activities are defined by the extent to which they focus on some

or all of these blocks, we explain the implications that each block can have for how firms should engage with social media. [v] Social media marketing aims at creating a brand and image management of companies and organizations. It provides an opportunity for customers to extend their feedback and create content that has shared in social networks. [vi]

Senecal & Nantel (2004) Stating the benefits of Social media Do-Hyung explains that the advantage with social media is that the modern consumers has different sources of information and experiences, which have been facilitated by other customers' information and recommendations. [vii]

“According to a report on NASSCOM, Social media gained momentum during 2013, capturing the imagination of both individuals and organizations across the globe as well as India.” The mobile revolution, rapidly expanding Internet usage and the growing popularity of social media sites spurred this trend. [viii]

Emphasis is towards social media sites by the marketing companies without which ecommerce sites may not get hits on their sites and survive organizations across industry sectors. In India alone, more than twenty-five per cent of online time of users was spent on social networking sites like Face book, Twitter, and Google+ (source:com), causing organizations to use the channel as a serious communications channel. In 2013, a growing community of large and small organizations began using social media networks to connect with, reach out to customers, and engage with them in new and innovative ways.

The benefits of Social media has been acknowledged and social media networks enable organizations to improve sales, reduce marketing expenses, grow business partnerships, benchmark themselves against competitors, generate leads, develop loyalty in users, gain market insight and increase traffic and exposure. Sandeep Arora, Director, Marketing, Intel South Asia “Social media, perhaps the only medium through which companies can engage and intrigue their consumers, create conversations and connect with them based on their preference” [ix]

“Sisira Neti (2011) in his paper titled Social media and marketing mentions that Social media marketing is significantly different from conventional marketing strategies. Social Media Marketing (SMM) offers three distinct advantages. One, it provides a window to marketers to not only present products / services to the customers, but also to listen to customer's grievances and suggestions. Two, it makes it easy for marketers to identify various peer groups or influences among various groups, who in turn can become a brand evangelist and helps in organic growth of a brand. And, three, all this is done at nearly zero cost (as compared to conventional customer outreach programs) as most of the social networking sites are free. [x]”

Citizen Journalism

The concept of citizen journalism also known as "public", "participatory" journalism, is based upon public citizens "playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and Information-Wikipedia

"Citizen Journalism" or Participatory Journalism is an evolving form of journalism through user generated content. When any common man in his capacity as a citizen of

a nation takes up the initiative to report things or express his views about happenings around him then the occurrence is popularly termed as citizen journalism or participatory journalism. Citizen Journalists are not bound by the conventional term of a journalist. Citizen journalists take up an initiative to express ideas irrespective of their educational or professional background.

The term *citizen journalism* derived from South Korean online entrepreneur Oh Yeon Ho's declaration in 2000 that "every citizen is a reporter." Oh and three South Korean colleagues started an online daily newspaper in 2000 because, he said, they were dissatisfied with the traditional South Korean press. Unable to afford the costs of hiring professionals and printing a newspaper, they started OhmyNews, a Web site that used volunteers to generate its content. In a speech on the site's seventh anniversary, Oh, the firm's president and CEO, noted that the news site began with 727 citizen reporters and had grown to 50,000 contributors reporting from 100 countries by 2007.

Ethics, Accuracy and Integrity practiced by Citizen Journalist as seen in social media

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves recommendations on right and wrong conduct. Media ethics is a topic for discussion for nearly a century. As the influence, impact and existence of media have become widespread its moral stance and adherence to ethical codes have become important issues. Ralph. E Hanson (2015) has stated that media ethics is a complex topic because it deals with an institution that must do things that ordinary people in ordinary circumstances would not do. Media ethics deals with the specific ethical principles and moral standards of all forms of media including print, broadcast, film, theatre, advertising and the internet. The ethics of journalism is one of the most well defined branches of media ethics and is often the most discussed one. The Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics has four main tenants: a) Seek truth and report it, b) Minimize harm, c) Act independently and d) Be accountable and transparent. The subject of ethics in journalism has to deal with a variety of things like manipulation of content (by governments, corporates or by journalists themselves or their organizations), distinction between public interest and privacy of individuals or confidentiality (for guarding the rights of individuals or securing national interests), and conflict with the law of the land regarding protection of news sources. In democratic countries like India although the freedom of the media is constitutionally enshrined and have precise legal definition and enforcement, the exercise of that freedom by individual journalists is subject to several clauses like the perspective of the media proprietor, the resources available for reporting any event or incident, the perspective of the readers or audience as well as the related reporter and thereby ethics of the concerned journalists

With the advent of Social Media and Citizen Journalism People are not only re-imagining how to make news and information, they are acting on their ideas: They are launching news websites, new partnerships, new apps, data libraries, and new ways of engaging with audiences. And they are figuring out new rules for these activities.

The Journalism ecosystem is evolving and giving rise to smaller organisations that are having bigger impacts. But the rise of these smaller news outlets has planted a variety of novel minefields in journalism's ethical landscape.

Review of Literature

We know that the distinctive features of news writing are accuracy, precision, impartiality, objectivity and public accountability. Yet these "canons of journalism" has come under serious threats in recent times. The news organizations and the reporters and broadcasters overlook and sometimes disregard the "code of ethics" in the acquisition of newsworthy information and its subsequent dissemination to the public. This can be because of a variety of reasons like evoking sensationalism, increasing readership and viewership, pressure from proprietors, coercion from powerful and useful news sources and selective diffusion and retention of news items by journalists themselves due to one or several of the previously stated reasons. Let us consider the first example. Most journalistic code of ethics comprises the principle of "limitation of harm". This involves the withholding of certain details from news reports like the names of minor children, crime victims or information not relevant to particular news reports, the release of which might harm someone's reputation or life or impede the function of the administration. The Aarushi murder case that set off a media frenzy is a case in point. A teenager girl named Aarushi Talwar was murdered along with a domestic servant of her house in a posh Delhi locality in 2008. The double murder case came under intense media scrutiny with the manner and grammar of the coverage triggering a debate on the limits of the media. The media pronounced guilt and innocence without proper corroboration by the concerned authority. Media's constant pressure forced the investigating agency (the CBI) to take the help of the Supreme Court which passed a restraining order barring the media from any scandalous or sensational reporting on the case. Justice Altamas Kabir stated "We are asking the press not to sensationalize something which affects reputations." The news was in circulation in the internet and social media with much hype and sensationalizing. The news items which belong to the second category should be carefully chosen and judiciously presented so that it does not intrude upon the privacy of subjects or impair their reputation.

Media, especially in current times being easily available and highly accessible, need to be vigilant and differentiate clearly between what and how much the general public needs to know. The issues that "interest the public" can at times become a grave threat to the security of individuals and nation. The deviation of the Indian media from established ethical standards is more prominent in the following example.

Referring to the recent posts, especially television coverage during the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai in 2008. The coverage of 26/11 attacks by the television channels in India came under severe criticism for turning a blind eye to the safety of the hostages, the security of the rescuers and above all the national interest. While all the other attack points were freed from terrorists by the 28th morning, the Taj Hotel remained under the control of the **terrorists**. **The television** coverage helped the terrorists by showing everything in their live coverage from the vantage point of the rescuers to the possible strategies and measures to be adopted by the National Security Guards in the "Operation Black Tornado" without bothering about the

impact it would have on the security concerns and delaying the rescue process. The sensationalism of live coverage of a rescue mission assisted a buoyant viewership which perhaps goaded the news channels to plan their telecast in the said manner. Neelamalar, Chitra and Darwin (2009)⁸ concluded that the newspapers' coverage of the 26/11 terror attacks was more balanced and ethical than that of electronic media. But this can be attributed to the nature of the print medium which had time to verify and present the relevant facts and stories, unlike the television channels which had to rush with their reports and had to always concentrate on 'being the first in the race'. Neelamalar, Chitra and Darwin (2009)⁹ stated that there was strong opposition to the way the electronic media sensationalized the attacks and a necessity to regulate media content during emergencies was felt. The Indian government chose to respect press freedom and abstained from regulatory measure but the News Broadcasters' Association (NBA) of India developed a code to be adhered to in the time of emergencies. This instance clearly shows the media's flouting of ethical norms. The television channels can claim that the live feeds were available in the social networking sites and the internet but there is no doubt that the television was a more prominent presence and the pictures telecast by the TV cameras were uploaded by the social networking sites. The commercial viability of the transmission in terms of popularity and advertisement sponsorship muted ethical principles. It would be an interesting study to make a quantitative analysis of the advertisement revenues for the national channels at the time of the live telecast. There have been repeated allegations against the media both press and television for conducting "sting" operations. Though sting operations provide startling revelations that benefit the society because of its exposure of truth, critics have questioned the ethical veracity of the use of the sting tactic for journalistic agenda. The sting operation can be used by the media to expose truths, espouse causes or realize societal agenda but it is attached with falsehood and bias and provides no scope to the victim to defend himself/herself under the circumstances. Such sting operations can unravel the truth but leaves a lot to desire when faced with questions on ethical propriety. The one-sided affair is a blot on the journalistic code of fairness and impartiality. Let us take the example of "Operation West End" popularly known as "Tehelka" revelations in 2001. "Tehelka," which means sensation, a weekly newspaper released video footage of top officials and politicians receiving bribes. The footage captured by the way of a sting operation exposed corruption at the highest order. But despite its ambitious intentions, after the initial shockwaves, the public became uninterested in the proceedings of the case. The methods used by the Tehelka reporters (women, liquor and bribing unsuspecting victims and violating their rights in the process found little approval of the public. The revelations created quite a stir regarding the ethical issues associated with the exposure. The Tehelka journalists were involved in false impersonations, paid bribes to the victims on false pretext and were guilty of other ethical transgressions too. The use of sting operations to expose corruptions in the society as against traditional investigative reporting techniques found few takers. Though after the **Tehelka operation**, several other sting operations involving Bollywood personalities, small-time politicians and government officials were undertaken the activities failed to have the desired effect. There is no doubt that traditional investigative journalism cannot be replaced by sting operations where the effects may be stark but the foundation is disparaging. According to Sadhu¹⁰, "an occasional sting operation may serve the cause for the time being. But it is no alternative to investigative journalism. To build

its credibility and ensure its freedom under 9 democracies, the media in India will have to turn to investigative reporting." There are various impediments like pressure of creating sensation to attract reader/audience attraction; predetermined agenda of proprietors or editors or the pressure of being the first to deliver the 'breaking news' to the users in the face of stiff competition from numerous news channels and several hundred newspapers. The Tehelka sting operation and others that followed were repeatedly aired in the national television channels in the subsequent days till the public lost interest in them.

Research Methodology

The primary data was collection by open ended questionnaire from 450 respondents from various segments of population and secondary data was collected through the media journal, newspapers and social media sources.

Analysis and interpretation of data

Data Analysis

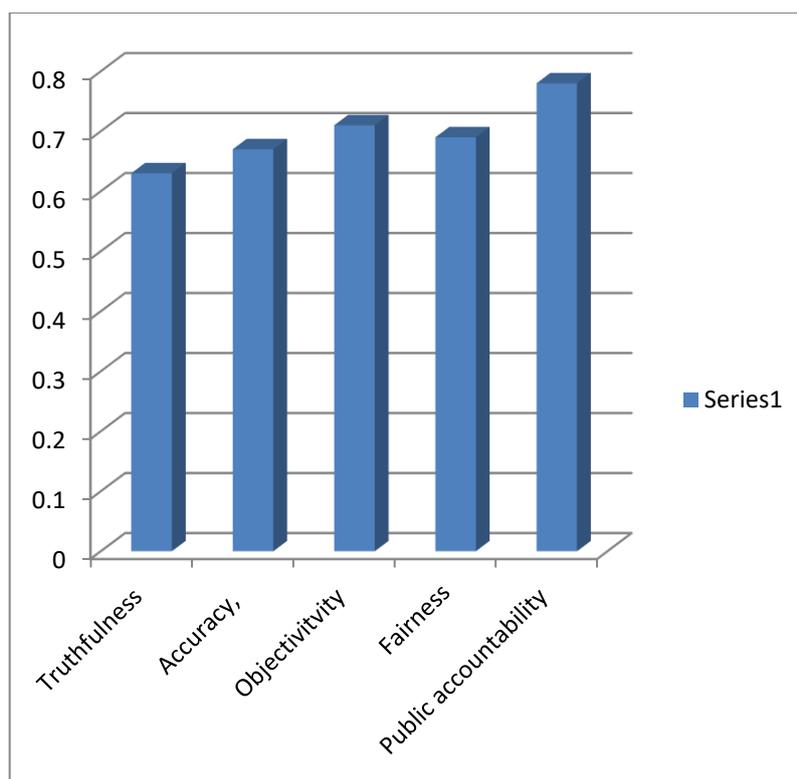
Some of the important dimensions were considered from the literature survey, which has been considered for the reasons or dimensions for checking the ethical principles followed in the media industry Those are truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness, and public accountability

The reliability test or Cranach's Alpha was conducted for the above said dimensions. This test generally used for internal consistency of data collected using questionnaire. The reliability test was conducted using SPSS (Software Package for Social Sciences) version 14 and results were represented in the Table 1.1.

The purpose (testing correctness, performance, reliability or security), in 3 categories in the age group 19-35 Years, 35-50 years, 55 years and above

Table 1.1 Parameters tested

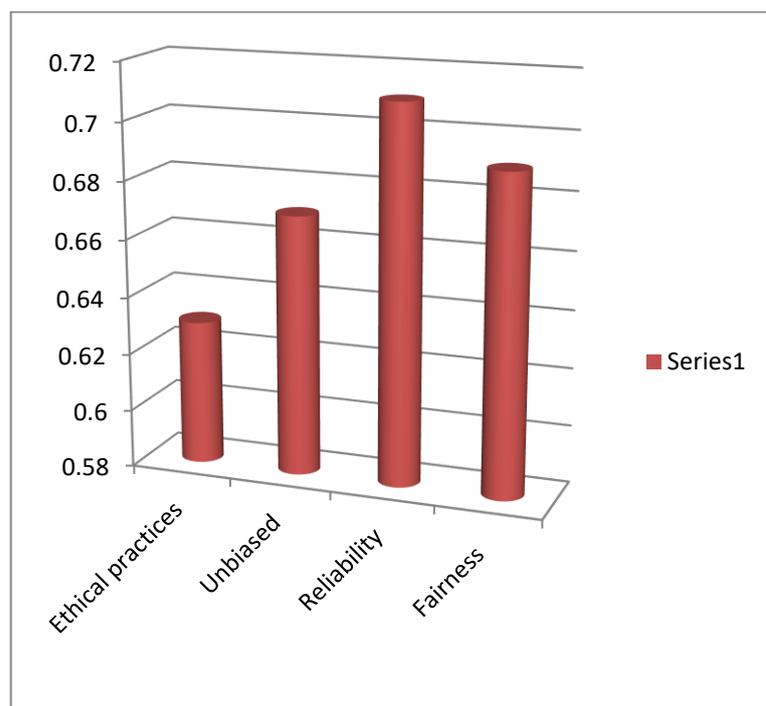
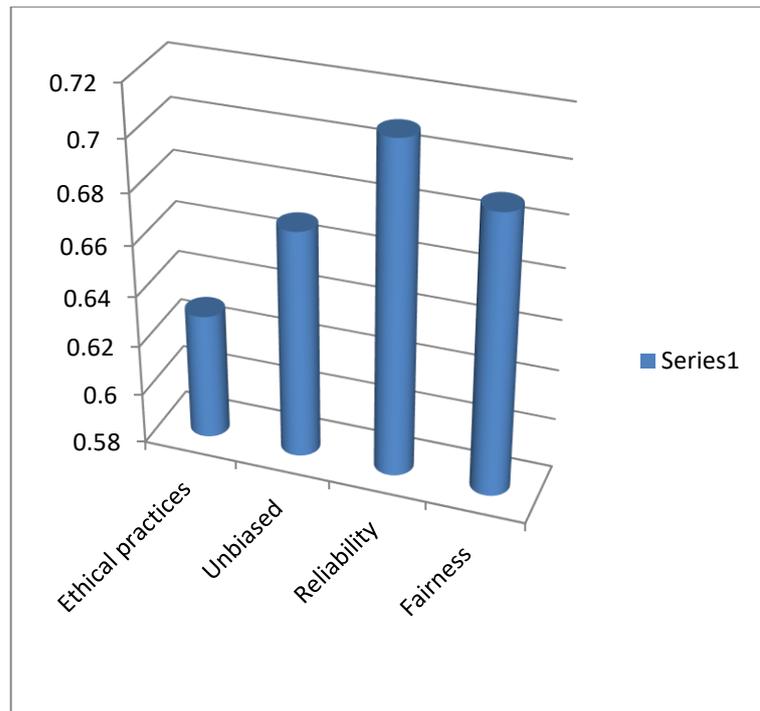
Dimension	Cranach's Alpha
Truthfulness	0.63
Accuracy,	0.67
Objectivity	0.71
Fairness	0.69
Public accountability	0.78



Cranach’s Alpha values obtained in the Table 1.1 are more than 0.60 and this was considered acceptable level for small size of data. In the questionnaire, questions were framed to measure these dimensions. These dimensions or reasons for the failures in the stake holder’s quality expectations the parameters were analysed based on the average ratings given by the respondents. Initially, average ratings were considered for each variable with respect to each dimension. Then the average of each dimension was calculated with respect to all variables. This result has been depicted in the Table 1.2.

Table 12 Other parameters tested

Dimension	Cranach’s Alpha
Ethical practices	0.63
Unbiased	0.67
Reliability	0.71
Fairness	0.69



Cranach’s Alpha values obtained in the Table 1.2 are more than 0.60 and this was considered acceptable level for small size of data.

After getting the average of the dimensions or reasons, it is ranked based on the average. Higher the average, indicates the higher rank and this has been considered as most influencing reason, according to this “Fairness” reason was the highest rank and this was considered as most influencing

reason for Quality problems in IT industry. Other reasons followed are in the order:

Conclusion

Journalists have to act independently not only for the sake of maintaining ethical standards but for zealously guarding their freedom and their constitutional rights. Journalists everywhere play a vital role in providing the public with knowledge and understanding. They must therefore remain sensitive to issues such as fairness, accountability and accuracy. Reporters continuously need to ask themselves ethical questions throughout different stages of their investigations and be ready to justify their decisions to editors, colleagues, and the public. Usually, the ethical way of accomplishing tasks is tougher, but all reporters should be willing to confront such a challenge if they want to protect the sanctity of their media. The Indian media has always held a high moral ground in the dissemination of news items.

The Presence of the powerful new media poses a challenge of greater proportions to the traditional mass media. The several advantages of the new media as discussed in one of the sections of this paper along with the advances in communication and information technology (ICT) gives it a thrust which the traditional media cannot hope to compete. The traditional mass media would be compelled to use the facilities offered by the internet for information gathering and assembling widening the information acquisition platform. But the mass media need to be careful while selecting the information sources or circulating any specific item. The presence of an omniscient media would facilitate the end users but for the existing mass media, it would be a challenge to counteract the advantages of the new media and make themselves viable to readers/audience. It is also a challenge to the mass media to conform to conventional journalistic norms and ethical standards while disseminating and collecting news. The news in the internet would be somewhat uninhibited and widespread as there would be both 10 familiar and new news sources. Moreover, continuous ingress of new senders and receivers would mean absence of regulation and unrestrained information exchange. The journalistic code of ethics calling on accuracy of facts, minimizing harm to sources and subjects, resolve to act independently and freely whatever the circumstances and determination to remain transparent would be the mast-bearer for the conventional media. The high standards of Indian journalism in the past and the acceptability and availability of the mass media at present would ensure the existence of ethical principles in the Indian news media.

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