Social media revolution - The new digital frontiers of Journalism

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Abstract:
Social media has become a phenomenon with the advent of technology and rapid rise in the reach across the world. It has made inroads in almost every sphere of business, communication and marketing.

Post globalization, Indian media industry has witnessed a sea change and revamped itself tremendously to be part of changing global scenario. Social media today, has become an integral part of the media industry, whether it is news deliverance, marketing or advertising. The social media revolution has changed and will continue to change journalism and news organizations.

Social media as a powerful tool has been realized largely across Indian Media industry, its importance is no longer debated. Therefore, the Indian media has successfully embraced social media technology and digital shift to widen and expanding their reach and exposure. The business strategies have widened and given a facelift; the social media platform has been effectively efficient used for expanding their business networks, whether news deliverance, advertising or other user generated content.

This paper aims at examining and exploring the role, growth and challenges of digital and Social media with a case study approach on Indian Media Industry.

Key Words: Indian Media Industry, Social media, revolution, technology

Introduction:
Social media has transformed and rapidly changed the Indian Media industry it has made inroads in every sphere and is used extensively for personal, professional, social and business purposes.

Today, Social media has taken on many different forms, including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking and has become an integral part of the mainstream media.

Mainstream media have adopted various social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and so on, as a result, these mediums and platforms have changed the way media content are produced, generated, consumed and distributed.

Today the trend is such that the consumers or audiences generate ideas and issues, picture or video scoops makes headlines on prime time television bulletins and make headlines on the front pages of newspapers and also the bloggers are redefining the cutting edge of journalism and the agenda of the mainstream stream media in India.

The term Social Media refers to the use of the internet and mobile technologies to turn information and communication into an interactive channel of communication.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Businesses may also refer to social media as consumer generated media (CGM) has drastically changed the life of individuals and corporations alike." [1]

According to Kaplan and Haenlein there are six different types of social media: collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft) and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP, to name a few. Many of these social media services have been integrated via social network aggregation platforms?

Social media is also means computer-mediated technologies that allow the creating and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. The variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available introduces the challenges of defining it, still, there are some common features. [2]

Charles Wankel (2010) defines Social media as the mass media used for the purpose of social interaction are called social media. “activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content /creation…microblogs, and more.” [3]

Peter R Scott & J. Mike Jacka (2011) describes “Social media is the set of web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers. With the ability to achieve massive scalability in real time, the social media technologies allow people to connect with each other to produce or reproduce a value through online conversation and collaboration.” [4]

Niranjan Roy states in his paper ‘Social media in India’ at a conference in NASSCOM, (2014) “

The growth of social networks and the emergence of simple tools – such as provided by YouTube, Flickr, Facebook and Twitter – for enabling the publishing of “personal media” has led to a rebalancing of the traditional relationship between news producers and consumers.
Paul Safio (2005) has reflected on this change:

"The Mass Media revolution 50 years ago delivered the world to our TVs, but it was a one-way trip – all we could do was press our nose against the glass and watch. In contrast, Personal Media is a two way trip and we not only can, but also expect to be able to answer back."

Social media in India

Social media have broken the media stereotype and emerged as a new power center turning out to be a medium for public discourse and debate knocking down the mainstream media that held and wielded power for more than a century in India.

'Social Media is the biggest shift since the industrial revolution’ one of the most popular and effective medium of mass communication, says Eric Qualman, Socialnomics. Therefore, we see the presence of politicians, celebrities, business, media to citizens all well connected on social media. Social Media adoption among Internet users in India is around 84%, according to a report in Innovation India. This translates to around 110 million social network users in India. The four main social media giants are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google Plus. [6]

Social media users in India are very young compared to the rest of the other nations in the world. Nearly 75% of social media users in India are under the age of below 35 years and nearly half of them are under 25 years of age. These usage patterns show that the expansion, adaptability and future prospects of the new media in India.

Since 1995, the use of social media and mobile technology is on rise as a result, there has been an incredible opportunity to personalize news consumption and cater to social media consumers and users by India Media. Willnat (2009).

The Internet is having a measurable and growing impact on media consumption in India and significant ramifications for traditional media companies, both print and electronic. Internet penetration is expanding quickly in India. The number of users is expected to more than double, from about 200 million in 2014—roughly 16 percent of the population—to at least 400 million, and potentially as many as 550 million, in 2018, according to the report.[ 7]

India as one of the leading markets in Internet and smartphone growth. India is the third-largest Internet market after China and the US and fastest growing Internet market.

Indiumedia giants are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google Plus. [6]

Prannay Roy (2013) categorically states that "the factors seem to have driven the rapid transformation of the media in India: first, the intrinsic force of new technologies that challenge and bypass government control; and second, the unstoppable energy of India’s chaotic, anarchic, and creative democracy. The combination has created an empowered, free, and aggressive media." [9]

Social media has gained a lot of popularity over the past decade and because of this popularity, other traditional Media have experienced declines in both business and popularity.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Digital Shift: Media and Content

The Media and Content Industries (MCI) that comprises of Print, broadcasting, music and gaming industries have witnessed a rapid change in format and design due to swift digital shift. Thus transforming the way information is generated, produce, consumed, distributed and stored.

Significant advances through the digital media, has resulted in a major restructuring within the Media industries in the context of dramatic changes in demand patterns. As a result, there has been a proliferation of strategies in the evolution of the market.

Palmer and Lewis (2009) argued that "the mainstream media channels and publishing industry have faced many challenges in recent times that have led to facing a downturn in their profit levels. Palmer and Lewis are correlating the performance of these traditional channels to the rise of social media in news, information and content management. [10]"

The new challenges, competition and tough economic environment have forced mainstream media to adapt and incorporate social media as an integral part of their business strategy with online content to align with and cater to the tech savvy and social media oriented needs of consumers and audiences.

The impact of digital technology on media consumption in India reflects the power of the Internet to disrupt traditional industries by changing the way consumers go about their daily activities—even when penetration rates are still relatively low. The average consumer today spends three to five hours a day with media, with remarkable consistency across location, gender, age, and occupation. Digital consumers already spend 35 percent of that time online, it's already far out spaces print consumption and is rapidly approaching TV consumption levels across all demographics. [11]

There also appears to be plenty of scope for traditional companies—both print and television—to stake out digital territory with ancillary genres in the short term and core news genres in the long term. Indian consumers are loyal to brands—they already go to print sites as a primary destination for searching news and for TV channel sites for TV shows and information.
The research foresees Indian print companies experiencing a significant shift as digital influence increases, lately publishers translate off-line print dominance into the digital attraction as consumers gain digital maturity and show a growing preference for news consumption online. [12]

The digital media industry in India has evolved and is growing, according to E&Y, the global consultancy major, has forecast that the industry would set to touch the Rs. 200-billion mark by 2020 with the digital advertisement spend growing at 23-28 per cent. The number of smartphones would touch the 520-million mark by then, giving people access to the web.

E&Y states that there would be a significant increase in broadband penetration and will go up to 40 per cent from 14 per cent. This will be instrumental in increase in media consumption, shifting beyond traditional media formats such as cable TV to digital media according to the report.

"By 2017, the country will have more than 350 million smartphones from 167 million in 2015. Low-cost phones and rollout of 3G and 4G broadband infrastructure would drive access to the web. This, in turn, would drive digital media consumption," [13]

According to a report on Future of Digital Content Consumption in India by the Federation of Indian Chamber and commerce Industry (FCCI) in its 2016 report on Media and Entertainment Business Conclave identified major trends in the digital media industry that are going to accelerate the growth.

Until a few years ago, TV and print media were considered indispensable for capturing the Indian consumer's mind and timeshare. The numbers spoke for themselves. Daily newspaper circulation stood at 100 million copies and growing, while TV penetration was at 900 million with over 690 satellite channels. But those dynamics have now begun to change.

The availability of affordable smartphones and tablets, together with falling data prices, has changed all that. It has fuelled the second-screen (and in many cases, third-screen) phenomenon. With the rapid adoption of smartphones and 3G/4G networks, content consumption patterns and consumer engagement channels are rapidly evolving. Delivery of media and entertainment is set to become personalised like never before. While India will no doubt continue to have a robust print market owing to still-growing levels of literacy and the affordability of print (a single newspaper could be read by more than a dozen people) in semi-urban and rural markets, online is where media is moving to on the back of several factors. [14]

2.2 Print vs. digital

The rapid growth of technology and digital content has posed extreme challenge on the Print Media and forced the industry to rise and change with times embracing new frontiers and adapting to the changing world. Thus the Print Media, as a whole witnessed digitalization of content and investing in digital media to provide news, information and communication on the desktop, laptops, PC or be it move on mobile.

Indian publishing growth bucks global trend where global trends in magazine, books and newspaper publishing combined are at a near flat or negative growth trajectory, the Indian publishing remains one of the fastest growing in the world.

Demographics, ever increasing literacy rates, educational needs, and strong desire to consume news and content in local languages, combined with nascent digital/broadband penetration, would fuel the growth and keep it relevant over the 2016-20. In 2015, the overall publishing revenues were at US$6133mn, an increase of US$302mn over 2014.[15]

As per a report on Indian media and entertainment by KPMG and FICCI, [16] the industry was valued at $15 billion in 2014, with TV at $7 billion and print media at $3.9 billion. Advertising revenue for TV stood at $2.3 billion and $2.6 billion for print media. Digital ad revenue stood at $1 billion. As a result today, most national dailies now have a dual presence in traditional and digital media either through e-papers or through mobile apps. This holds good in, both in terms of national and regional newspapers. They have rapidly progressed to capture online readers.

Today we see a shift and change in Print Media across India embracing the unavoidable transition and shift to a digital future. An interesting outlook of the Print media is that it has fundamentally remained unchanged and same from the era of the printing press. In India traditional print media flourished and even survived the onslaught of new electronic media age with radio and television. With preferences of audiences and the consumers shifting favouring the format, reach and flexibility.

Globally, the shift is evident and a reality with the majority of the consumer's user preferences and habits are beginning to change in favour of digital consumption. Increasing laptop and computer usage, growing internet penetration and availability of a large body of varied and quality content (largely free) initially drove digital readership, according to a report 'Indian Print Media's Innovation Dilemma: Digital Natives Are Coming'. [17]

Digital news strategy is the focus area by most media houses that are looking for ways to improve user experience through innovative presentation, interactivity, localisation, personalisation while retaining the quality of the content delivered to the Mobile handset.

Girish Menon (2014) India currently has 762 million active mobile users with more than 60 million smartphone users and around 10 million tablet users.

Around one third of internet users in India access the internet on their mobiles. Globally, reading habits gravitated towards online with the explosion of smartphones and this trend is likely to replicate in India as smart phone penetration increases combined with increased 3G and 4G coverage. [18]

2.3 Social media and User Generated Content (UGC)
Today the nature of breaking news has shifted from Editors, Journalists, newsroom to Social media and User Generated Content (UGC). This has created a new kind of culture and pressure on the professionals to focus on content curating and verifying rather than being first to break the news, fundamentally changing the nature of role and responsibility. With the changing of role and pressing demand journalists have embraced social media tools like facebook, twitter, blogs as news tools, marrying the culture of the web and new media with their sums up the approach in most mainstream organisations as they marry the culture of the web with their own organizational norms.

According to a report by Mary Meeker’s Internet Trends report, Year-on-year, Pinterest pin creation is up 75%, Twitch video broadcasts are up 83% to over 11 million per month, stories written on Wattpad, are up 140%, and Airbnb reviews are up 140%, 65% of Snapchat’s 100 million daily users create content every day. Content platforms have a lot to gain from strong creation tools. [19]

Therefore, staying up with the trend, there has been new and changed editorial guidelines accordingly to cater to the needs of Social Media reporting, social media editors and twitter correspondents are being appointed and new wave of job culture with technologist are underway.

UGC and social media is playing a significant role in diverting and rerouting traffic to traditional news content and emerging as important search engines as a driver of traffic and revenue. Recognize its potential the traditional media are utilizing resources to exploit social networks to drive reach is mainstream media.

UGC is not trading or replacing journalism but are creating and redefining journalism with an additional, different and diverse opinion creating a new layer of information.

However, Nic Newman states in his 2009 study “The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism”, that there are three main reasons behind mainstream news outlets getting on board with social media: [20]

- Telling better stories: Building on Dan Gillmor’s [21] insights that there is always someone who knows more than you do, news organisations are crowd sourcing comments, pictures, videos insights and ideas. These supplements and complements their own news gathering sources and enriches their output.
- Making better relationships: Engaged users tend to be more loyal and spend more time, making them more valuable to advertisers or for promoting and selling other company services.
- Sociologist William Dutton at the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) argues that we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks that can act independently of the traditional media. He has termed these developments the emergence of the ‘Fifth Estate’:

High ‘Networked individuals’ (helped by new platforms like social networking and messaging) can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions. This provides the basis for the pro-social networks that compose what he terms and calls as the Fifth Estate.[22]

Dutton strongly believes that the Fifth Estate may be as important to the twenty-first century as the Fourth Estate has been during the eighteenth century. [23]

The mainstream media are posed for major overhauling direct competitor and revamping with the new trend and new sphere from activists to bloggers to social media activists, who are turning to be an alternative source of news and information.

Another reason for the growing popularity of social media is their speed of breaking news. Newman finds that on social media news is broken hours ahead of traditional news organizations. [24] He gives the examples of Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, Hurricane Katrina in the USA, The Arab Spring and so on.

Dube argues that, The ability of social media to beat traditional media for breaking news is made possible because social media can easily reach where traditional media cannot and by the fact that social media is able to outperform news sites in terms of audience engagements. [25]

The paper examines how journalists at leading news organisations in India are increasingly involving audiences in the way they research and tell stories and refer to social media and UGC.

It explores the dilemmas and issues raised by a greater audience engagement through few news reports that made headlines first through social media. It looks at how the mainstream media coverage of breaking news events is changing, using topical case studies from the Mumbai terror attack (2008) and Nirbhaya Gang rape (2012).

### 2.4 Rise of Citizen Journalism in India

With globalization and corporatization of media industry as a whole and main stream media focus diverting from its objective of fair reporting to profit making, many social and vital issues rejected by the media have led to a huge gap between issues reported and neglected. With an aim to bridge this gap a new concept and trend of participatory journalism has slowly but steadily emerged and caught up in India known as ‘Citizen Journalism’.

American media critic Jay Rosen, who writes the blog pressthink.org, argues that professional journalism was, till recently, optimized for low participation. “Up until a few years ago, the ‘job’ of the user was simply to receive the news and maybe send a letter to the editor”, 26 he opines. “Today, of course, all these things have changed: people are connected ‘across’ to each other, as effectively as they are connected ‘up’ to big media. This I call The Great Horizontal. People can talk back to the news system and make their own media. That's a power shift”[27].
Citizen journalism is the act of citizens “playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information”, according to the seminal report We Media: How Audiences are shaping the Future of News and Information, by Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis. They say, “The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.” In 2003 Online Journalism Review article, J. D. Lasica classifies media for citizen journalism into the following types: 1) Audience participation (such as user comments attached to news stories, personal blogs, photos or video footage captured from personal mobile cameras, or local news written by residents of a community), 2) Independent news and information Websites, 3) Full-fledged participatory news sites, 5) Other kinds of ‘thin media.’ (Mailing lists, email newsletters), and 6) Personal broadcasting sites. The term citizen journalist did not exist before the advent of the Internet. Citizen journalism grew in tandem with the growth of the interactive functions on the Internet. Although it encompasses many aspects and comes in different forms, including blogs, forums, uploading photographs or videos to the media, citizen journalism have one fundamental basis. In “Writing for a convergent media”, author Thom Lieb says this one thing is “contributing journalistic content to the news process” and gives blogging as an example of one component of citizen journalism. [28]

According to Niemen Journalism, during the protests of the Nirbhaya gang rape incident, “activists and journalists used social media to follow the protests and to discuss India’s problem of violence against women” (Niemen lab). The Indian Government, which is disgracefully slow when it comes to passing significant legislative action, expedited action because social media garnered “international attention to India's problem of violence against women” (Niemanlab) [29].

Until recently, there was no sight of this ‘power shift’ in India. The mainstream press continued to out distance alternative forms of news expression like social media in popularity. Newspapers, news channels and news sites continued to relay the news; journalists continued to select and write it; and media barons may or may not have tempered it. And all the while, the public was largely a receptor. Now ordinary people are increasingly reporting what they are witness to: whether scams, accidents, corruption, civic apathy or philanthropy, and they're creating a network of micro-reports on social sites like YouTube and Facebook. They are editorializing on blogs and commenting on news sites. Their views are sought by mainstream press, and on occasion, their first-hand reports and opinion pieces also make it to print.

In India today, the media have dramatically changed and effected journalism for both the journalist and the audience. It is no longer a one way communication as it has become highly interactive and a strong tool of communication. Therefore, at present a number of Indian television channels, news portals and blog sites are seen offering common masses a platform to be citizen journalists and share their stories with rest of the world. Empowerment is a crucial tenet of citizen journalism in India, a democracy with more than 1 billion people. Citizen Journalism is visibly on the rise and is linked to the notion of active citizenship and the need to strengthen democratic governance. It has been definitely helped people to raise their voices in addressing many issues like women's safety, right to education among girls, health and many more that is vital for the progress of society and country. With more and more people getting involved an interesting trend is set by national channels in India, where ordinary citizens can take up issues that are making headlines or are being neglected by mainstream media and report as citizen journalists, popularly known as CNN –ibn CJ Show 30 aired on a weekly scheduled. A new component of citizen journalism created by CNN: ibn Live – The CJ show that allows citizen journalists to report a story on the show and on website.

The channel other networks have also incorporated live feeds from Twitter and Facebook into their online stories. In this case, Citizen Journalism has revolutionized the entire media in the country and is successful bringing out vital issues to mainstream for debate and discussion and increasingly being recognized as a powerful force in this regard.
In India it is definitely helping people to raise their voices addressing issues that affect common people. It has revolutionized the entire media in the country; it is influencing and making an impact in the mainstream media. It has become a powerful tool for every citizen to report the news that touches their lives.

One interesting example that brought in change in India was during the December 2012, Delhi gang rape -- that made headlines all over the world. From December 2012 to July 2013, overall 238 citizen journalism updates were carried by Cj.ibnlive.in.com that included pictures and videos. Ordinary Citizens became Citizen Journalists to raise voice against a serious crime that existed in our country, but saw little action was taken and every time a case of rape or violence against women was reported it was just reported, neglected or dismissed. The slow justice process has frustrated many. During the Delhi gang rape for the first time a wave of change was witnessed and power of Citizens through Citizen Journalism was actively playing a role.

There was also a plethora of citizens on the ground reporting developments as it happened and using the Social Media to post their videos and comments. The mainstream added a section in their news bulletin and programs as “Citizen News & Comments from the Indian blogsophere to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Tweet messages and Facebook status updates started flooding Twitter with photo and video scoops regularly lead television bulletins and the front pages of newspapers, whilst a new category of opinionated blogging is redefining the frontiers of journalism itself. This study explores how mainstream media organisations are responding to this wave of participatory and social media, linked to a historic shift in control towards individual consumers.

Social media formats have also begun to influence the nature of news journalism itself. Twitter hashtags and Facebook comments have become part of the daily currency of news output, the blog and micro-blog format has been widely adopted as a way of providing regular short updates on a story through the day and news journalists have begun to have more regular contact with audiences on a daily basis. Yet, this is clearly a snapshot of a rapidly evolving ecology of news production and consumption, illustrated by the trends described.

Claudine Beaumont (2008) in her report in the Telegraph titled ‘Mumbai attacks: Twitter and Flickr used to break news’ strongly believes that it is a powerful medium and states that “Anyone who doubts the power of the social web need only take a look at the activity on Twitter on 26/11, the micro-blogging service that has more than six million members worldwide broke the news moments after the first shots were fired.

It was for the first time that a social media platform twitter was used to capture every moment that was unfolding by the eye witness in Mumbai. Tweet messages were being posted from to the site twittered Mumbai attack, Shots being fired to Hospital update. The twitter started sending message for medical help, care, blood donors, helplines numbers and contact information were posted within minutes. Catching up with the trend, many people used the platform to inform about their safety.

A group of bloggers based in Mumbai used their Metroblog, which usually dealt with the everyday minutiae of life in this bustling city, [31] as a news wire service, bringing its readers, and the wider world, news of the incident as it unfolded.

The social media users were highly alert and active and within few minutes of the news breaking of the Mumbai attack a new page on Wikipedia, 2008 Mumbai Terror attack was created [32] a new page about the terror attacks with a team of citizen editors adding a staggering amount of detail, often in real time, to provide background information about the attacks.

Jessica in her report in the Guardian (2008) mentions that Reactions from the Indian blogsophere to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai were posted as events unfolded last night, with first hand witness accounts and real-time citizen journalism efforts.

The effectiveness of the web showed itself once more with the terrorist attacks in Mumbai - with the photo-sharing site Flickr and the microblogging system Twitter both providing a kaleidoscope of what was going on within minutes of the attacks beginning. As India’s financial capital, Mumbai is home to a number of the country’s most computer-literate users - who have been quick to adopt the microblogging format of Twitter, which limits messages to a text message-length 140 characters.
Flickr was soon host to a set of photos from Vinukumar Ranganathan, who grabbed his camera and headed out into the street; his set of pictures taken on the night contained 112 photos with dramatic scenes of the aftermaths the attacks in the district of Colaba.

Group blog Ultrabrown blogged about the attacks as they happened with regular updates:

If there's one thing that I didn't think I'd ever do when I took to blogging, it's live-blogging during a bombing/hostage situation. I can't believe this is my city. I can't believe I just passed Ramada hotel 10 minutes ago and didn't realise that the little crowd near the gates would end up being a gunfire battle. I can't believe the Taj hotel is burning. They've got hostages in there. More than half are American and British hostages.

India Uncut recalls the beginning of the attacks as he was standing down the road:

That's when we realised that this was much more than a random police encounter, or a couple of gunshots. We heard that terrorists with AK-47s had opened fire outside Leopold's, the pub down the road. We watched transfixed, and as the apparent scale of the incidents grew, we realised we couldn't go home. Prafulkr blogs the chronology of terrorist attacks in India since 1993.

Gauravonomics points out that the micro-blogging service Twitter seems to be the best source for real-time citizen news on the Mumbai terrorist attacks.

Twitter meanwhile provided a constant stream of information through its search function, allied to the use of tags - #mumbai being the favourite as the situation developed.

Blogger Sonia Faleiro describes her encounter with one of the hotel's guards:

The security guard, a tall, thin Sikh gentleman, who had ushered us back into the hotel when the shooting started, was walking down the street with a friend. His shift had ended. I went up to him, and shook his hand. It felt amazing. 'You saved our lives,' I said to him. 'You didn't have to. We had paid our bill, we were leaving, not entering the hotel. We weren't your responsibility.' He smiled at me, the smile of a little boy. 'Thank you, madam,' he said.

This too is Bombay, I thought to himself. A city where a stranger who owes you, nothing will do anything, everything for you.

• You can also read, more instant analysis and coverage at Global Voices; they have an interesting take on the anger felt by bloggers at the media for their coverage, in which they quote blogger Kalyan Varma:

In tough economic and global times like this, we will win only if we move on with our lives and keep this behind. This is how we fight terror, not overreacting to this, not invading countries and giving up our freedom. Bad enough the security guards check my car and bags each time I enter a mall or hotel here in Bangalore, I do not want to give up any more of my freedom.

Conclusion:

The internet, social media and Citizen Journalism has the ability to complement and restructure, change mainstream media in the new age of Journalism.
Clay Shirky states that that the internet’s ability to support ‘many to many’ conversations, gives that former audience the chance to talk directly to each other. Social media compliments mainstream journalism but cannot replace it. Social media is forever changing and evolving making it difficult to keep up with it and find ways to use it effectively. It is just another form of accessing journalism, which is new and developing. [40]

Newman (2009) states that it is great that big media organisations are using social media to their advantage rather than letting the changing technology scare them. It is good that they are working with the new technologies rather than against them, as the use of social media can be so effective in hearing about new stories the minute they happen, gaining sources and images direct from scenes and engaging with their audience.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that social media is not always a positive experience. Many media organisations are using social media and UGC allowing their readers to comment on news stories, blogs and anything else on their websites. Now, this can be a truly positive and a great thing to do when you get people interacting with the organisation and each other, sharing thoughts, opinions and stories. But there is always the possibility that there will be a few less than helpful comments from people that feel the need to share their views offensive. It’s important to monitor the UGC received from using social media in order to make news organisation websites as effective as possible. [41]

Another aspect of the complementary nature of social media has been the changes in attitudes within media companies and the growth of formats, such as live, curated blogging, that integrates audience opinions into mainstream coverage. For media companies, this can give them a competitive edge in news gathering in addition to increasing a sense of belonging and engagement.

In her article “We’re All Journalists Now”, Ritz [42] has given a number of examples where wrong information was provided on social media. She argues that there is no accountability there and the most dangerous thing is that there is no remedy once the information is disseminated. She asserts, “Too often, social media has taken its own opportunity to spread feathers rather than facts”. Everyone seems to forget that these feathers can destroy someone or can create havoc in the society.

Ritz concludes by saying, “Posting on social media is a great advance that allows everyone to become connected, for transparency in a democracy — as long as it is done in a thoughtful and responsible manner” It is okay to hope that everybody who writes will pay attention to ensure that information provided is correct but that seems impossible.

Social media critics find another serious problem with it, which is lack of impartiality and objectivity. However, the critics of social media say this idea of freedom is the weakness of social media. Now everyone who has a computer with an Internet connection or a smart phone with a data plan is a journalist. No doubt, news is reaching a lot more people through social networking sites and mobile apps etc. but there is none to control what floating in the cyber world. No verification, no fact checking, no edits, nothing.

Sambrook feels that the consumers will have to ultimately decide on this. He maintains: With an exponential growth in the information sector stream and profession convergence is inevitable, journalism has seen change quite frequently from Printing Press to Electronic media, new media and now Social media.

Technology has changed the way information is collected, transmit and share information, technology has brought is new aspects and formats as changed as the consumer needs and audience demand. As there is no escape from the change that has already happened, journalists have to embrace the change and redefine their job. Convergence, is the need of the hour.

Lastly the questions of ethics and professional standards are raised and needs serious deliberations and there is scope for further research to study the issues of ethics and credibility in Citizen Journalism. Citizens who practice this form of journalism do not adhere to any Ethics or moral code of professionalism and in the process raising questions of bias, reliability and accountability that has lead to abundant criticisms. The democracy of media and citizens is interlinked and multilayered that needs a deeper understanding and insight.

As the saying goes, information is power, but misinformation and the ability to mislead can be equally powerful and potentially disastrous. Media as a fourth estate is entrusted with providing accurate, accounting information to the public. Reporting can make and break reputations, affect social, political, economical financial balance worldwide. With so much power concentrated in the fourth estate, it's important that journalists follow rigid standards and as a matter of ethics, accuracy matters more than just reporting.

These concerns are particularly relevant with social media proving to be an effective and power tool, where the definition of what exactly constitutes journalism is becoming less clear cut as a result. The lines between journalism and citizen journalism may be blurred, but there are still defining factors which provide clarity to the distinction between professionals and citizens. Just as legal definitions and legislation are being forced to recognize the importance of modern forms of media, perhaps the definition of journalism will be morphing in the future, and begin to account for bloggers and media activists.

End notes:
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