

# Trends of Online News in *Facebook*

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## Abstract

With the advent of social media especially *Facebook*, news has been redefined. Audiences like commenting and sharing news in the virtual reality. The discourse of democratization of news, citizen journalism and virtual community identity has been the order of the day. Political economy of media and participatory news culture has been the dominant narratives in online news posts in social media. This paper attempts to unravel the space of news posts in *Facebook* in the light of gatekeeping, political economy of media, community identity and newer relationship among the audiences in the virtual reality

**Keywords:** *Facebook*, Online News, Gatekeeping, Participation

## 1. Introduction

With the advent of the Internet, the society has been transforming in multiple folds including media and communication. It is an agent for overall growth and international development. However, it has also created digital divide which could be because of disparity in gender, inaccessibility to education, dearth of local contents and improper supply chains (Huizer, Shah, Arroyo OBE, Okorafor & MacKinnon, 2017). This medium even has become part of leisure space and social life. Predominantly, the teenagers or “Generation Y” are the potential audiences and have been focusing on the Internet as a medium to search any content of their requirements.

According to a report by Kantar IMRB, the Internet users in India are anticipated to reach 627 million at the end of 2019. The report also reveals that 97 percent of audiences use mobile phone as one of the devices to access the Internet. The proliferation of Internet users could be attributed to improved availability of bandwidth, cheap data, growing awareness of governmental plans, resulting

in bridging the digital divide between the urban and rural India. The growth rate of Internet penetration from 2015 to 2018 is from 9 percent to 25 percent in India. India was at the rank of 69 among 139 countries in terms of Internet speed (The Economic Times, 2019). The use of the Internet has direct impact on the uses of social media. Social media based on interactive computer-mediated technologies enables the creation and sharing of information in virtual communities (Kietzmann, HermkensJan, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). It moulds human practices and is also influenced by society. By the virtue of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), social media has become part and partial in human society.

Significant growth of social media facilitates people to connect with each other (Chakraborty & Bhat, 2018a). Even news agencies are also taking advantages of that by spreading news in social media. As a result, it improves the readership of a news agency. Social media could be in various forms – *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *LinkedIn*, *Tumblr*, *Snapchat* and the like. Such kind of media has become indispensable for communication between the government and the citizens. The traits like

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candidness, participation, and sharing have propelled its popularity among the masses. However, social media can also weaken our strong ties by hiking in social interactions and lessening their depth at the same time (Vriens & Ingen, 2017). *Facebook*, a form of social media, has certain key features which keep on engaging the visitors in virtual reality. It creates a social sphere, acts as a vehicle for social media marketing and can be act a medium of protest. The users of *Facebook* have touched to the mark of 1.52 billion with 9 percent growth in the countries like India, Indonesia and the Philippines in the December quarter of last year (The Economic Times, 2019). Like entertainment and business contents, news has its own space in this medium. Traditionally, news is disseminated from legacy media in the form of print, electronic and digital media.

It is found that since news circulation has significantly increased in *Facebook* and other platforms in social media, it is worthy to understand the space and nuances of news positioning in *Facebook*. News can be understood in the light of etymology, newness, commodity, tone, and news worthiness. Moreover, Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge have discussed news values across culture by indicating the parameters of impact, audience identification and pragmatics of media coverage (Caple & Bednarek, 2013). It is also found that digital journalism start-ups are exists in the picture of Indian journalism. To have a start-up, low investment is required, which has been an encouraging factor (Biswal, 2016). Hence, the future of digital journalism is bright in India.

## 2. Literature Review

Chakraborty and Bhat (2018b) points out that online community is a significant social media tool that influences people's opinion. Even news agencies have their online community and brand page in *Facebook* which helps them to identify their readers significantly. Sometimes, consumers get the news contents in the *Facebook* as per recommendations by third-party platforms. Visibility of news publishers remains critical, unless they are high in branding in the domain of news publications (Kalogeropoulos and Newman, 2017).

Media Insight Project explores that millennials use *Facebook* to get news. Such kind of news contents are engaged in tune with social connection, problem solving,

social action, and entertainment (American Press Institute, 2015). In addition, Yusuf Ahmed, Idid and Ahmad (2018) finds that in such kind of platforms, audiences are engaged in sharing, commenting and discussing news with their peers, and thus, it has become an extended version of the motivational model of communication. Gupta and Dhama (2015) underlines that sharing the online information in *Facebook* develops new relationships. However, in course on online deliberations, it raises serious privacy concerns. However, Chakraborty and Bhat (2019) claims that in online platform, people look for opinion leaders to take their decision. Even, news agencies often work as opinion leaders in online social media context which has significant impact in people's thought process.

Paskin (2018) points out those news media organizations have considered the Internet as natural extension of their media houses. Richard Sambrook states that mainstream media adopt inputs from social media. The role of a journalist is getting transformed from a gatekeeper to a sharing the information to the public. Sambrook also states that information is not journalism (Bunz, 2009). The differences and similarities have been found in news reported in print media and social networking sites including *Facebook*.

Anderson and Caumont (2014) stresses that several digital media outlets prioritizes the importance of news storytelling in social media. Moreover, *Facebook* has become news powerhouse when compared to any other platforms of social media. It enables the audience to discover the news. The researchers also point out that it is the entertainment news which is more dominant and business news is the least in *Facebook*. In the context of blogging in journalism, Bulatova, Kungurova and Shtukina (2019) states that blog has the right to communicate like the traditional media. Journalism practitioners have accepted the space of blogging to enhance their audiences. It has created an alternative space to mainstream media. Further, Biswal (2019) agrees that such kind of alternative is fueling the space of citizen journalism. The production, distribution and consumption of citizen journalism are different from mainstream media. On the contrary, Kantar Media (2018) finds that *Facebook* as a news platform has become less encouraging to discuss and share the news posts. There is no doubt that *Facebook* is successful but news in *Facebook* is full of privacy fears, exposure risk, content clutter and falling relevance.

### 3. Research Gaps

There are perspective write ups on the given topic. However, there is not a single thorough qualitative study on the space of news posts in *Facebook* in India.

### 4. Research objectives

The current study attempts to understand the space of news posts in *Facebook* in India.

### 5. Methodology

By using the researchers' *Facebook* account, the study has employed the qualitative content analysis of news posts appeared in *Facebook* in India from July 2018 to June 2019. In-depth interviews with journalists have been conducted to understand the space of news posts in the given platform.

The most popular persons in *Facebook* from India are: Narendra Modi, Priyanka Chopra and Virat Kohli and their fans are 44093132, 40119660 and 37274887 respectively (Socialbakers, 2019). The news posts pertaining to these most popular persons in *Facebook* have been considered to understand the space of online news. Further, *Facebook* posts from individuals, print news media organizations, TV channels, exclusive digital news media organizations and news apps were considered. *Facebook* posts on certain events like Pulwama attack, Balakot air strike, and release of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, Atishi-Gambhir issue over controversial pamphlet, Mamata Banerjee meme and victory of Smriti Irani have been analyzed. Qualitative content analysis of posts has been analyzed to understand the nature of news contents in *Facebook*.

### 6. Theoretical Frameworks

Kurt Lewin underlines that each and every media content undergoes checking and rechecking through various layers of filtering. It could be the reporters, editors, media owners and advertisers. Sometimes the reporters on the field also do the job of gatekeeping. He or she reports an event or drops the story in the field itself (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009).

Countering the traditional form of gatekeeping, D. Gillmor (2006) stresses more on inclusive method of news

reporting and distribution. This theory opposes the top down approach of news dissemination and encourages citizens to take part in the process of production, distribution and consumption of news. Further, Henry Jenkins (2006) states that: the rise of participatory culture empowers the citizens in articulating their issues and opinions. Such kind of discourse makes the audience more active instead of remaining mere passive consumers of contents from media organizations.

### 7. Findings and Discussions

When online news posts in *Facebook* pertaining to popular persons and controversial events were analyzed, certain trends were found in India. *Facebook* adopts and fosters algorithm changes which are driven by social interactions in subjective manners. It has become a discovery mechanism for news in mainstream media. The political economy of online news in *Facebook* is different from mainstream news as ownership, organization structure and functioning are different (Weiss, 2018). It has democratized the production, distribution and consumption of news. There is a free flow of information as this digital platform is well accessed by the citizens. Sometimes it is supplementing the mainstream media in terms of news feeds. However, comparing such platform with mainstream media remains naive. The space of online news in *Facebook* has resulted in the emergence of citizen journalism and participatory culture which empower the common citizens (Jenkins, 2006). Citizens are engaged in producing, liking, sharing and commenting on the news on popular topics. Audience engagements are sometimes with the *Facebook* posts circulated from print news media organizations, TV channels, exclusive digital news media and news apps. This digital platform has been proved as an alternative platform for journalism. Also, the audiences who like or follow media houses or journalists reflect a high level of engagement with news in *Facebook*.

Gatekeeping of news contents remains a regular process in newsroom in a traditional form of journalism (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). However, online news in *Facebook* takes turns and twists. If an individual is a producer of any news content, he or she can self-censor it. News content can go unchecked without any interventions or interferences from anybody or any entities. The news media houses choose particular contents for *Facebook* to gain trust from audiences. It also further propels and

intensifies the audiences to land on their own digital platforms and incidentally consume other news contents as well. In addition, if the audiences share some news posts, it multiplies the popularity of news media houses.

News in *Facebook* and other social media has proved a platform for voicing the dissent and provides fodder for discussion. Generally, this amount of flexibility cannot be possible in other modes of news dissemination channels. While understanding various news posts in *Facebook*, it is found that this social media has the power to reshape the news (Anderson & Caumont, 2014). It enables the audience to explore the news of their interests. This kind of reaction from the audience was found when there were news posts on the popular issues like, Pulwama attack and the release of Abhinandan Varthaman, Mamata Banerjee meme case, electoral victory of Smriti Irani and the like.

News posts in *Facebook* have been employed for protests and social movements for the identity and emancipation of any community. It could also be a blog which provides news to the audiences in the social media. Blogging, by the virtue of technological innovations, initiates digital activism for the well-being of a community (Biswal, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2008). Such kind of community media becomes mass media when the contents are liked, shared and commented from other audiences. It creates and brings a justified identity to a deprived community from the brink of marginalization.

News values in mainstream media and *Facebook* are different. Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge state that the property of news values - impact, audience identification and pragmatics of media coverage -are dominant in online news (Caple & Bednarek, 2013). The difference among blog posts, newspaper stories, magazine articles, TV stories, posts from exclusive digital platforms are blurring.

Qualitative content analysis of various news posts signals certain amount of negative and biasness. Fear of privacy issues, exposure risk, fake news, content clutter and falling relevance are there. Citizen journalism sometimes accommodating inaccurate contents and lack of minimum gatekeeping leads to ethical issues. Individual news posts suffer from Afghanistanism while ignoring controversial local issues. The practice of Afghanistanism devalues local or national issues. Certain news posts are used for character assassination. This unethical and illegal practice happens when the audiences are indulged in

damaging the reputation of an individual or group. It is often used in political communication which is reduced to propaganda.

## 8. Scope for Future Research

The current study has number of scopes for future research. News posts on politics, entertainment and business in *Facebook* can be studied separately. National and regional issues through news posts could be analyzed for further understanding. Understanding of fake news and news values can be another topic for future research.

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