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Growth of Internet and its reflection in news rooms: A Study

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Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed the development and growth of the Internet just like the post second world war era saw the growth of television. Internet helped us to expand the workplace from conventional nine to five job at a central location to 24x7 hours a day from any setting. Use of Internet by news media professionals is steadily rising due to its capacity to improve news coverage and other routine activities of a journalist. Varieties of web tools have empowered news media professionals in improved means of information gathering, reporting and other routine journalist tasks. In this context this study is an attempt to analyze the information behaviour of news media professionals in Kerala in the age of Internet.

Keywords: Information behavior; Internet; News media; Journalist; Authenticity of data.

Introduction: Use of Internet by journalist differs depend upon the tasks they are assigned. Though they seems to be a homogeneous group, the utilization of Internet differs. The information needs of news media professionals depends on the kind of job the person does, the background and personality of the individual , the level of information awareness, IT skills, depth of training in IT, gender, time, age , access to resource, information overload, organization they work..etc. Information needs arise when an individual no longer can manage with the knowledge that he or she possesses. It is the information need that prompts information seeking.

Outline of the Study: This study is an attempt to examine how the proliferation of Internet applications influenced journalistic routines and how it influenced the information behaviour of professionals in news media. Is Internet powerful indeed to change information behavior and work patterns of professionals in news media? The study gives answer to the very important question. Three key components taken for the study are *the Internet*, *the news media* and the concept *information behaviour*. The study examines variety of Internet applications that journalists use professionally, media platforms, background activities, and professional opinions about the impact of the Internet on journalism.

Research instruments: This study adopted a self-constructed questionnaire as the primary research instrument and interview as the secondary research instrument. Due to the

exploratory nature of the study, this combination of research instruments is viewed as the most effective method to obtain data that would reflect the current situation.

Research setting: Targeted professionals for this study were from selected News media houses in Kerala. Total number of news media professionals targeted to include in the study ranged from 300-350. Press, traditionally the biggest and the most demanding information user, is given priority. The other news medias included in the study were the Television News Channels and All India Radio. A uniform cross-section of professionals were identified from news media organizations. For the convenience of the study news paper has been grouped under Print media and news channels, All India Radio and online news portals are figured in Electronic media. In a nutshell entire population of media house are grouped in two entities namely (1) Print and (2) Electronic.

Variables: Variable is a characteristic of the sample or the population that we intend to measure. Variables can be two types: Qualitative and Quantitative. Qualitative variable is the one that cannot be expressed in numerical terms. A quantitative variable can be expressed in numerical terms. Hence it is also called numerical variable. In this study the variables used are *beat*, *media house*, *age* and *job profile*. In which *age is a quantitative variable* and *beat, media house and job profile are qualitative variables*.

Data collection procedure: A letter, stating the details of the study, its purposes, goals, and time requirements, was sent to the targeted media organizations. This was supplemented with telephone calls and E-mails. Personal contacts were also utilised for this. The researcher traveled entire Kerala where the questionnaires were personally delivered to each destination. Since direct access to journalists at their respective organizations was difficult due to time-constraints and security issues, a contact in each organization was identified to act as a liaison between the researcher and the professional. Once the questionnaires were delivered, responses were tracked, through the liaison. The completion of questionnaire survey took around six months.

Data analysis technique: For analyzing the data, percentage analysis method has been used and interpreted on the basis of objectives formulated. Description about the analysis of data are tabulated and presented.

Current source of information and ideas for the stories

Current source of information	**n**	**%**
Internet	130	12
Media releases	167	16
Personal contacts	240	23
Talking to the experts in the area	213	20
From media outlets	304	29
Total	1054	

The main source of information is media outlets. 29 % of the population marked the choice. 23 % of the population opted personal contacts, 20 % prioritized talking to experts, 16 % media releases and 12 % of the population find Internet as source of information. The response clearly indicates that Internet is not considered as the main source of information and ideas for the stories.

Obstacles while seeking online information

Barriers	n	%
Information Overload	198	24
Authenticity of data	295	36
Lack of guidance to sources	97	12
Lack of regularly updated websites	69	8
Access restrictions to paid online resources	97	12
Complexity of web based services and resources	63	8
Total	819	100

Out of the 308 respondents 36 % pointed out authenticity of data as the major problem. Information overload was the main obstacle for 24 % of the professionals. Lack of guidance to resources and access restrictions to paid online resources were the main problem for two groups with 12 % each. Lack of regularly updated websites and complexity of web based services and resources were the other obstacles which pointed out by two groups each having a share of 8 %.

Criteria to choose search engine

Barriers	n	%
Use the popular or familiar search Engines	231	34
Default search from the browser	120	18
Depends on the information needed	109	16
Depends on search results	96	14
Depends on speed of search	49	7
Expert advice	71	11
Total	676	100

Responding to the question about criteria to choose search engine, the study found that most of the news media professionals (34%) choose popular or familiar search engine. It was a surprise to find that 18 % of respondents rely on default search from the browser. Findings show that need based search is performed only by 16 % of professionals. This can be pointed out as a shortfall from the side of professionals. Choice of search engine is a crucial factor in getting desired results. Each search engine uses slightly different protocols to categorise and index the results of crawls. As per the findings we conclude that professionals are not well versed in the art of selection of an appropriate search tool and strategies.

Use of advance search options

Choice	n	%
Yes-Always	99	32
Yes-some times	56	18
No	153	50
Total	308	100

Advance search options can be considered as a skill in browsing. Advance search options give enough room to limit unwanted results. It helps to sharpen our query. This study reveals that advance search options is not a choice of 50 % of the professionals. 32 % of respondents showed that they use advance search options. Fewer professionals use the options some times. Search strategy sophistication, is based on the ability to use advanced features provided on most search engines and the ability to avoid common mistakes that hinder progress. Skilled professionals can successfully locate information on the desired topic. Major share of the participants are not much concerned about the advanced search features of search engines.

Heavily used internet applications by complete sample

Internet application	n	%
Email	187	12
Search engines	186	12
Social Networks	180	12
Chat/Online discussions	174	12
Internet groups	101	7
Blogs	135	9
Micro blogs	69	5
RSS feeds	34	2
Wikis	171	11
Live streaming video/audio	169	11
Internet Phone	59	4
Others……	44	3

Email, search engines, social networks, chat and online discussion forums are the heavily used Internet applications. Of which Email is the most heavily used Internet application. The data has been rounded of for easy understanding of the study. Almost 12 % is the average for the four Internet applications. It is quite interesting to note that RSS feeds are the least used Internet application.

Mode of acquiring knowledge competency

Mode of acquiring knowledge	n	%
Through formal course of study	48	14
Self Instruction trial and error method	216	63 63
Assistance from colleagues	39	11
Training given by the employer	41	12
Any other specify	0	0

Majority of the users embraced the use of Internet as a new tool. Now Internet skills become need of the hour for the professional in media. Skill levels of the professionals were analysed by the way they acquired the knowledge competency. 63 % of the professionals acquired the skill through self instruction trial and error method. Only 14 % acquired the skill through formal course of study.

Were there any IT skills/ information skills modules in your syllabus of your course?

Opinion	n	%
Yes	127	41
No	181	59

The study found that 59 % of the respondents have the opinion that there was no IT skills/information skills module in their syllabus of their journalism course. This data can be useful for guiding training programs for journalists and improving teaching curricula.

Degree of Adoption of Internet

Tasks	n	%
Get back ground for news	289	14
Obtain reference to cite in a news	185	9
Get news to put in a story	150	7
Get Statistics for news items	167	8
Get Contact sources	241	11
Define terms or concepts	198	9
Find photographs	244	11
Find story ideas	182	8
Find rare facts	145	7
Check and verify facts	148	7
For editorial./feature/opinion analysis	199	9

Impact of Internet inevitably stimulates information seeking in general and with the result it supplements the consultation of other sources also. The spread of the new technology in the last few years has clearly made reporters faster and much more productive. Data analysis shows that professionals depend on Internet mainly to "get background for news" (14 % each). Least scored tasks are "Get news to put in a story"

"Check and verify facts", "find rare facts". The purpose of this section is to gain an idea about the current skill-level and areas of strength, or weakness.

Dependency in conventional sources and channels of communication

Sources	Decreased		No change		Increased	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
TV	25	8	198	64	85	28
Radio	248	81	60	19	0	0
Print Newspaper	0	0	301	98	7	2
Print Magazine	48	16	240	78	20	6
Books in hardcopy	47	15	161	52	100	33
Librarian	271	88	30	10	7	2

The study reveals that 64 % of the respondents have the view that there is no change in depending on television for their routine task. In the case of radio 81 % of the professionals have the opinion that dependency towards radio is decreased. As can be seen from the table, 98 % of the professionals have the opinion that there is no change for news paper. The study reveals that 78 % of the professionals opined there is no change for print magazine. The study shows that 52 % marked no change for books in hard copy. It is disheartening to note that 88 % of the professionals have the opinion that role of librarian is decreased.

Change in usage of conventional channels of communication

Means	Decreased		No change		Increased	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Written mail	306	99	2	1	0	0
Telegraph	308	100	0	0	0	0
Telephone	66	21	242	79	0	0
Mobile phone	0	0	0	0	308	100
FAX	206	67	98	32	4	1

The study reveals that 99 % of the respondents have the view that usage of written mail is decreased. In the case of telegraph 100 % of the professionals have the opinion that usage of telegraph is decreased. The study reveals that 79% of the professionals have the opinion that there is no change in the use of telephone. The study shows that 100 % of the professionals have the opinion that usage of Mobile phone is increased. The study found that 67 % of the respondents have the opinion that usage of fax is decreased

Criteria for evaluation

Evaluation criterion	n	%
Authority of the publisher	297	17
Accuracy of information	289	17
Convenience in obtaining information	123	7

Currency of information	200	12
Coverage of topic	198	11
Interactivity with website	101	6
Objectivity of publisher	231	13
Promptness in obtaining information	189	11
Cost of obtaining information	111	6

Authority and accuracy were viewed as the most important criteria for evaluating information found online. The population placed less importance to "cost of obtaining information" and "interactivity with website".This section was designed to examine the skills of professionals in evaluating information available online. This examination of information evaluation criteria provided important data that would guide future efforts in terms of creating help guides, enhancing electronic tools, improving teaching curricula, and raising awareness of the available tools that can assist in evaluating information found online.

The greatest change in practice of journalism: The Internet is one of the youngest and fastest growing media in today's world. Its growth is still accelerating, which indicated that it has not yet reached in its highest expansion period. This section is intended to examine the greatest change in the practice of journalism due to Internet technology.

Greatest Change	**n**	**%**
Get touch with the happenings of the world online 24 x7	101	33
Prompt communication process	118	38
Freedom of expression	11	4
Professional satisfaction	28	9
Flexibility of work hours	33	11
Access email alert/feeds targeted specifically to my particular beat	6	2
Share information through social web technologies	10	3
Others	1	0

The Internet had significantly increased the productivity of the professionals, restructured the job content and at the same time changed the skill requirement. However Internet and related technologies have become part of the modern newsroom. These technologies have impacted on efficiency and productivity in the communication processes of the news media professionals. 38 % of the professionals marked "Prompt communication process" as the greatest change while 33 % prioritised "Get touch with the happenings of the world online 24 x7" as their choice.

Conclusion: The tremendous increase in the Internet connectivity and high bandwidth access is shaping the way news media professionals communicate, construct their stories, publish their material and interact with their audiences. But it is interesting to find that it cannot be counted as an evidence for change in source of information. It would be an incorrect inference if we conclude it as journalistic work radically changed by Internet. 95 % of respondents indicate that though they generally rely on Internet as first hand

information for various professional tasks they are not in a mind set to consider the information as credible without cross checking it from an authentic source. Lion share of professionals have the opinion that Internet can provide a pretty good background information source. For in-depth knowledge and authentic information news media professionals rely on media outlets. The response clearly indicates that Internet is not considered as the main source of information and ideas for the stories. The Internet tools appear to supplement rather than displace other conventional sources. Another interesting finding culled out from the study is that the current educational curricula of media studies are obsolete and required a comprehensive effort to update it.

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