Journalist - Source Relationship and Changing Professional Roles in the Era of New Media Diversity

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Abstract:

Around the globe the connectivity between journalists and their news sources has been transformed due to the expanding digital technology, inclusion of public relations practitioners in sourcing and rise in the roles performed by citizen in journalism. Such influence of digital and social media forms has greatly influenced the professional roles performed by the journalists. On the other hand, it is controlling the system in such a way that the spread of voices of authoritative and others is becoming a challenging task to handle. This competition among the sources has blurred the boundaries between audience, producer, and consumer by minimizing the distinction between opinions based and factual reporting and making working practices difficult for journalists. As such, changes the roles performed by journalists are greatly affected by making their decision-making ability a challenging task to handle. They have created a more complex relationship between the journalists and their sources and framing of the issues by the media. The current study aims to review how various research studies have examined the inter relationship that exists between the journalists and their sources in the era of new media and social networking and how such relation has played role in framing the issues by the journalists.

Keywords: New media, sources, media diversity, dynamics, journalists, professional roles

INTRODUCTION

Mass media being the representative of the fourth pillar of the estate is considered as a key element in democratic societies as it has the obligation to monitor public and political matters and to make sure that no one of them crosses the borders of their powers. Due to the recent developments in the current media system the democratic role of media now goes beyond watchdog and information provider and shifts towards inspiration and nourishment of our daily democratic systems

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(Dahlgren, 2009). This change in the practices of mass media practitioners is studied by many academicians and a rich body of literature produced in this aspect focuses on professional roles and responsibilities of journalists in the current interactive technological era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Journalistic professional roles always remained the focus of attention of most of the studies and are based on various methodological and conceptual frameworks. Early literature produced in this aspect was mostly related to journalistic functions of correlation, entertainment, surveillance, and transmission with reference to the normative factors (Wright, 1960; Lasswell, 1948). These normative roles were also considered by many other studies in the form of responsibilities of news media including entertainment, information, continuity, mobilization, and correlation (McQuail, 2000). Some other studies have analyzed the analytical dimension of the journalistic professional roles by distinguishing between the roles of journalists as adversarial, disseminators, populist mobilizers, and interpreters (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986,1996). A growing body of literature, on the other hand studied roles of journalists with reference to different societies. In the Arab world, studies concluded that journalists act as "change agents" in the political arena and they have the mission to bring social and political reforms (Pintak, 2014). Whereas most Pakistani and Indonesian journalists were defending their national sovereignty by preserving unity and focusing more on societal development (Romano, 2003; Pintak & Nazir, 2013). This showed that the roles assigned to the journalists and the duties they perform are not limited to any border or geography, rather it has linkage with their profession and duties they perform (Hanitzsch, 2011) being part of that profession.

Journalism in the Era of New Media

Since the last few years, the field of journalism has been facing many critical developments which include the spreading of advance communication technologies, diffusion of digitized content and media convergence etc. According to studies done by new media literates, these new media advanced forms are playing a bigger role in creating interactive media systems in which more direct relationships exist between the citizen and the gatekeepers of information and people are getting access to inexpensive communication technologies due to which the monopoly gatekeepers enjoy over the system is vanishing (Coleman, 2005; Gurevitz et al., 2009). New media technologies have shifted communication among audience at the more personalized level, resulting in pressures on both media practitioners and receivers to expand their network to maximum platforms in order to get informed and updated. Due to this influence new media is now considered by many as being the fifth estate because of its communicative power and the provision of public and social benefits to the public (Dutton, 2008).

In the present digitally transformed networking society there has been a drastic change in the news system creation with a greater emphasis on the open and fluid system rather than the closed networkers. Such a shift has resulted in an increase in the number of content providers and sourcing platforms. Talking specifically about the traditional media outlets, the system has altered to a greater extent and the media industry is facing a lot of challenges ranging from readership, advertising and leading to the content providers and information sourcing. Another biggest challenge is the increase in the number of citizen journalists and user generated content providing

diverse voices. In such a scenario deciding whom to select and whom to ignore is another biggest challenge to encounter for journalists when it comes to their news selection and fulfillment of their professional roles. The reason behind this interplay is that in the 21st century more people are now accessing the 24-hour news through their digital devices and social media platforms. Researchers while surveying this dependency concluded that online news platforms are now taking more importance than the traditional news media content. Another conclusion drawn was that the social media is affecting the sourcing practices and news making criteria in which the public, government and celebrity influencers play a leading role in shaping news media content by filtering and sharing and then reconstructing the news in a diverse manner (Newman, 2016).

Studies on media sociology and news production by journalists have remained the center of attention for the last several decades. Journalist's patterns of gathering news stories along with the types of stories they cover and the roles they perform in fulfilling these duties reveal a lot of information related to social dominance and news authenticity (Ericson et al., 1991: Carlson, 2009). According to the studies the patterns with which the news sources are selected provide a detailed insight into the power sharing phenomenon. Similarly, the roles and authority provision also provide an overview of how sources influence journalists' decision-making power. Studies on such patterns open a lot of assumptions, questions and provide alternative ways of selecting the sources (Carlson, 2009). Media source relationship is considered by many as being a mutually dependent relationship as they both are derived by a strategic relationship which involves interest of both the parties involved (Franklin, 2003). Most studies took it as a symbiotic relationship as far as the connectivity between both the media and its sources is involved and when one asks who comes first, the answer is that the sources always lead (Gans, 1979). On the other hand, many studies supported the point that in the current social media environment the power balance has diverted more towards the sources rather than the journalists. One can clearly analyze it by taking the case of the public relations industry which is gaining more influence day by day and the news actors gain more voice through online news platforms rather than the mainstream media (Broersma et al., 2013).

Source selection is one of the toughest tasks to be carried on as journalists have to face a hierarchy of credibility because of the element of neutrality the sources possess. It has been observed that the social dominance of elites gains more favor rather than the minors when it comes to shape up news selection routines. But with the rise of social media and diversity of voices present, the situation becomes opposite now as how to frame an issue is more in hands of sources rather than journalists. A study carried out in United States took a close examination of the journalist source relationship by doing analysis of the national press coverage and source selection through the portrayal of mugging. They concluded that industry officials and government ministers have more advantage in media coverages, and they play a big role in shaping the news agenda (Hall et al., 1978). This influence is reflected in the professional ideology the journalists follow. As the official sources of information, they took the additive advantage due to their status, their standing in society and their expertise and knowledge.

MEDIA DIVERSITY AND JOURNALIST SOURCE SELECTION

Studies on media diversity always possess a prominent place in journalism and communication research. But in the last few years due to expanding media power the concerns related to

functioning of media outlets and the diversity they possess became center of attention of academic debates and literature. This is due to the expanding power of social media as the diverse and decentralized exchange of information online has transformed society and the focus of studies as well (Bennet, 2003). Many research studies now turn their attention to analyzing how the experiences of journalists affect their news making practices. Starting from news making to newsroom socialization, new media control and regulation is there in all aspects of journalistic practices. Selecting any news source has been largely determined by the professional experience of the journalist. This is so because the more experienced a journalist is the more he would be able to follow the professional norms, obligations and values (Sigal, 1973). On can say that sources are always important when it comes to selecting any news because all the selection and production processes depend upon the ways through which a source is selected and used for information collection (Neill & Connor, 2008). While on the other hand journalists' power to set agenda of the news determines who will have the permission to share his voice in the news (Broersma er al., 2013).

Media sociologists, while describing the process of news selection and sourcing by journalists, viewed that such practices of journalists are shaped by the long term stable established professional standards and routines. Like in print and TV newsroom, the process of news selection is determined by the combination of power and efficiency of journalists. Power in this case is attributed with the authority journalists give to their sources whereas efficiency relates to the allocation of limited resources with perspective to time and space (Gans, 1979). Many studies took the relationship between journalists and their sources as a negotiation of control (Ericson et al., 1989). Some others while doing content analysis counted the number and kinds of sources to show how journalists access sources (Carlson & Franklin, 2011), routinization of sources (Wheatly, 2020) and issues of power, bias, influence, and representations (Berkowitz, 2009).

New Media Diversity and Journalistic Practices

Journalistic professional practices are largely determined by the roles they perform in society. The researches carried out to analyze the roles largely studied them by considering empirical and normative models. The conclusions drawn from them showed that the content journalists produce determines how they select, produce, and create the news content (Esser, 2008). Loosen and Schmidt (2012) & Vu (2014) while discussing the roles in the era of social media have enlisted various changes in different aspects of newsroom environment ranging from shifting the roles and boundaries of journalists between gatekeepers and consumers to reshaping of the news routines (Mabweazara, 2013; Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2016), and to reshape the journalistic norms and values (Hellmueller et al., 2013; Karlsson, 2010).

Many research studies took journalistic practices as subjected to critical changes while using social networking and it depends on the levels with which social media impacts the practice of modern journalism and how journalists use these new forms of communication in their work. As in the modern newsroom's practices, reporters depend more on the social media for newsgathering, fact-checking, conducting research, contacting sources, and obtaining story ideas (Moon & Hadley, 2014). This is because reporting routines began to shift from story selection to verification practices (Singer, 1997). Now the journalists are caught between adjusting old routines and adopting the new ones (Tandoc & Vos, 2016). Some others also expressed the similar concerns by

concluding that while in their practice of accepting online news sourcing techniques, journalists seem reluctant to use information retrieved from social media as direct and quoted sources in their reporting (Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2016).

The studies on professional roles (Donsbach, 2008; Norris 2009; Odugbemi, 2008; Weaver & Willnat, 2012) being part of professionalization have been the subject of great concern in journalism research for the last 50 years and provide valuable insight into journalistic professionalization as well as the analysis of the impact of journalism on political and democratic life. Many researchers took professional roles as dimensions of professional ideology (Cohen, 1963), professionalization (Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996) and journalism culture (Hanitzsch & Mellado,2017); Vos, 2005). Relating their roles with these phenomena in the modern social media era is now diverting the focus of research towards studying more audience centered approaches.

Many scholars conducted surveys by taking samples of individual journalists and analysed the professional roles that are considered most important by journalists across the globe (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Patterson & Donsbach, 1996; Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). However, in some studies significantly less attention has been paid to the analysis of how different types of professional roles materialize in journalistic role performance, the specific journalistic discourses, and their writing styles as the outcome of concrete newsrooms decisions (Mellado, 2014; Vos, 2002). On the other hand, in many studies lack of dialogue between the study of professional roles and news content has generated various parallel discourses within the field of journalism studies by concluding no effective interaction between the two (Mellado & Van Dalen, 2013; Schudson, 2011; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

The relationship between journalists and their sources are elaborated in many researches in a way that the roles and norms assigned for professional journalists even assist people in capturing, writing and sharing news over social media platforms, allowing the reader to take control, challenging the traditional concept of 'one-way news' (Sagan & Leighto, 2010). Even today the traditional media forms are now under the spell of new media. It is evident from the fact that the shift in media from traditional to social presents the news industry with opportunities and challenges, where social media has become a significant communication and news-breaking tool (Alejandro, 2010). Journalists now took leverage of these social media platforms as news aggregators to assist in their work to stay ahead with audience demands (Sagan & Leighto, 2010).

Many reports pointed towards the fact that due to the rising percentage of people consuming news from social media as opposed to traditional television, radio, or print or digital newspapers, it is getting difficult for individuals to decide to trust what they read online (Pew Research Center, 2012). Other studies also showed similar changes as these social networking sites and microblogs provide users with more information than ever, while credibility serves as an information filter (Ellison & Boyd, 2007). On the contrary many mainstream news organizations have historically struggled to retain their gatekeeping role and to adjust their professional practices to reflect a modern media landscape. They have also attempted to "normalize" new media platforms, specifically blogs and microblogs, to fall in line with their traditional norms and practices, while simultaneously adapted them to the changing norms and practices of this new media environment (Lowrey, 2011; Singer, 2005; Lasorsa et al., 2012).

While examining the trends of new media use worldwide many studies discussed the situation that social media has now become a new centre of news consumption in the UK and the North America societies. This trend has shifted the pattern of news consumption and thus influenced news production. For Facebook users, they intend to read less and spent less time on news stories, as compared to traditional media audience and news organization website users. Social media users are more inclined to read entertainment, sports, and local events, rather than international news or business news (Anderson & Caumont, 2014). Similarly, the traditional media practices for adjusting with new media are studied in order to show the adjustments made to the dramatically changing media environment, many traditional media have reformed the organizational structure and the division of editorial labour (Vobic & Milojevic, 2014).

Some leading studies while discussing the journalistic roles and routines conducted a survey of journalists in five countries and found that journalists' daily routine on digital platform include searching information/sources online, fact checking, news gathering and posting information. The populist mobilizer, disseminator, and interpreter roles are mostly associated with the daily task of journalists pertaining to digital media and social media (Weiss, 2015). Another study revealed that journalists used social media for background information, beat reporting, and sources of information. While in the researcher's discussions on implications of social media, several journalists accepted the creation of new beats for reporters i.e., social media beat (Gagnon et al., 2014). Even others have found that social media is altering the socialization pattern for new and future journalists to socialize with their audiences. Many news organizations, indeed, have already attempted to integrate the use of social media into their operations to increase the distribution of their products and to augment audience engagement (Sivek, 2010).

The progression of society and the influence of dominant social networking go side by side in the current era. Studies in this domain suggest that now social media is the most influential and powerful tool for news collection and dissemination whether it would be about politics, sports, celebrity, or foreign news (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010; Ahmad, 2010; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Cozma & Chen, 2013). Many studies analyzed the use of social media by journalists in terms of their breaking news coverages (Allan 2012), in times of elections (Broersma & Graham; Burgess & Bruns, 2012) or analysis of their roles during different conflicts and crisis (Hermida et al., 2014) whereas less attention has been paid to how they balance their roles, routines and social media platforms handling. Many research studies concluded that journalists use social media platforms to talk about their working scenario, for blogging or sharing their opinion etc. (Canter, 2013). In several instances the researchers pointed to the fact that newspaper editors with longer experience endorse the role of professional journalists as interpreters and disseminators while using social media and do not positively rate the role of citizen journalists who act as mobilizers, interpreters, and adversaries (Nah & Chung, 2009). This analysis pointed to the fact that social media sources in view of many are not admired to a greater extent by many as compared to the role performed by the professional journalists.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, the research showed that the journalistic field is challenged by several critical developments, among which the ongoing spreading of interactive technologies, digitization of messages and convergence of media formats are some of the most important. According to new

media experts, these new media applications clearly present a more democratize picture of societies by making it a more direct relationship: as now the citizens gain more strong access to the social media platforms and the gatekeeping monopoly once enjoyed by editors and broadcasters is diminishing (Gurevitz et al. 2009; Coleman 2005). The Internet has indeed shifted communication to a more personalized level, and in return both the media and the politicians are forced to address more channels to compete for the attention of a more fragmented audience, as well as target their messages to more fragmented groups than ever before. Therefore, the new media applications could be called as the Fifth Estate, since they possess several key distinctive and important characteristics such as the ability to support institutions and individuals to enhance their 'communicative power' with opportunities to network within and beyond various institutional arenas, and the provision of capabilities that enable the creation of networks of individuals which have a public, social benefit through social networking websites (Dutton 2008).Similarly this new media spreading has made professional roles of journalists more challenging and their roles and responsibilities are increasing.

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