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**Reshaping newsrooms in the age of social media: A study on reliability, verification of user-generated content for journalistic use**

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## **Reshaping newsrooms in the age of social media: A study on reliability, verification of user-generated content for journalistic use**

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### **Abstract:**

The study analysed the impact of social media among journalists in the state of Karnataka in relation to utilisation of user-generated content from social media, authenticity of content, ethical and legal issues of social media. Social media, in a way, is an advanced form of new media. Social media can be described as an online platform for interaction and conversation among people. Primarily, they are internet- and mobile-based tools for discussing and sharing and information among social beings. These media include blogs and social networking sites, social bookmarking and news aggregators. All of these platforms place the process of information dissemination into the hands of people who may or may not write or report professionally. They disseminate news and information through social interaction, using much accessible publishing techniques. The omnipotence and handiness of the social media has made it omnipresent too. The present study adopted a survey method among 500 media professionals across Karnataka representing four administrative divisions namely Bengaluru, Belagavi, Kalburgi, and Mysuru. The respondents are working for newspapers, television channels, radio and news portals. This includes editors, associate editors, sub-editors, bulletin producers, reporters, and photographers.

**Key words:** Social media, fake news, reliability, verification, user-generated content

### **Introduction:**

Social media is defined as blogs, social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, microblogging sites such as Twitter, photo/video sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr, and review sites or web discussion forums such as eopinions.com, defines the Cision survey. In essence, social networks are tools by which individuals and groups can gather through shared interests and ideas; which are being used on a large scale by journalists and news organisations to determine the target audience for their news content and to provide them with it. They are also being used to target promotional behaviours toward demographic groups that have already expressed interest in the information offered to them.

Being an internet user largely means being a social networker. A large number of digital consumers in this country have at least one social media account, and surveys indicate that all account holders have used social media in some form. With the advent of smartphones, daily time spent online continues to rise. Smartphones can be firmly credited with the growth in usage of social media in recent years and its continuing importance in the daily lives of digital consumers. Among the younger age groups, mobile phones are now the primary device for social media usage. Even if few groups of internet users in this market prefer to access social media on their personal computers and laptops than on their mobiles, the difference seems to be extremely narrow.

Multi-networking is another emerging trend in the social spectrum which is also a key factor in the increasing importance of smartphones for online social activities. A portfolio of social media accounts is now comfortably maintained by internet users, who turn to a different one for particular activities or to engage with specific social groups– all of which has been made simple by the easy access that smartphones currently provide.

If the press is considered the Fourth Estate, William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute termed social media as the ‘emergence of the Fifth Estate’. In a 2009 interview with Nic Newman, former BBC Future Media Controller, Dutton said, “We are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks which can act independently of the traditional media.

Highly networked individuals helped by new platforms like social networking and messaging can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions.” The Fifth Estate research project examines the internet’s role in enabling new forms of democratic accountability and voice, comparable to the press of an earlier era.

To connect with readers, viewers, and listeners in real time, social media has been a real boon for journalists in the landscape of news media today. Online trends can be monitored, and contributions and feedback can be received from the public by reporters and news organisations on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

The way journalism is produced today reflects new practices relying on digital and social media components (Schmitz Weiss 2015). This has an effect on the resulting journalistic products, relationships, routines, and culture (Robinson 2011).

A relatively large part of existing empirical studies into how the internet and social media are used as information-gathering sites by reporters has focused on breaking-news events. These studies have typically emphasized social media sites’ potential for rapid dissemination of information that may serve as sources for journalists and users’ more or less deliberate contributions to knowledge production of unfolding events (Allan 2013; Belair-Gagnon 2015; Hermida 2012).

**Objectives:**

1. To assess the utilisation of user-generated content available on social media by media professionals
2. To explore ways of verification by media professionals while using social media
3. To assess the authenticity of content available on social media

**Methodology:**

A survey research design was adopted because it was best suited for the purpose of the study. The survey method was used to collect information from the media professionals working in Karnataka representing different media organisations including newspapers, television channels, magazines, radio, and online news portals. A total sample size of 500 journalists working from four administrative divisions across the Karnataka was selected for the purpose using simple random sampling method. The composition of respondents includes editors, associate editors, assistant editors, sub-editors, bulletin producers, content creators, reporters (seniors and juniors), cameramen and photographers.

Secondary data was collected from newspapers, books, journals, annual reports, and websites.

The method of data collection by the researcher was through a questionnaire. The information collected through questionnaire was suitably tabulated keeping in view the objective of the study. Simple percentage and graphs are used to explain facts and figures. The statistical tools like chi-square was applied wherever necessary. SPSS software and Microsoft Excel were made use of.

## **Hypothesis**

**H<sub>1</sub>**- There is association between gender and usage of social media as a reporting tool

## **Results and analysis:**

**Table No.1**  
**Gender wise distribution of the respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	312	62.4
Female	188	37.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table No.1** shows that among the total 500 respondents selected across Karnataka, 62.4 per cent respondents of them were male journalists while 37.6 per cent were female journalists.

**Table No.2**  
**Using social media as a reporting tool**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>P value</b>
Male	137 (27.4)	86 (17.2)	89 (17.8)	312 (62.4)	<b>49.135</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>.000</b>
Female	73 (14.6)	13 (2.6)	102 (20.4)	188 (37.6)			
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b> <b>(42.0)</b>	<b>99</b> <b>(19.8)</b>	<b>191</b> <b>(38.2)</b>	<b>500</b> <b>(100.0)</b>			

Reporting tools such as social media help improve journalists' skills of reporting and storytelling and engage readers in multimedia. These tools can help with research, sourcing and data compilation

**Table No. 2** shows that 42 per cent of respondents said that they use social media as a reporting tool. About 38.2 per cent of respondents use social media as a reporting tool sometimes. A total of 19.8 per cent respondents do not use them as a reporting tool.

Gender wise classification denotes that 27.4 per cent of male respondents and 14.6 per cent of female respondents said that they use social media as a reporting tool. About 17.8 per cent of male respondents and 20.4 per cent of female respondents said they sometimes use social media as a reporting tool. A total of 17.2 male respondents and 2.6 female respondents do not use social media as a reporting tool.

Chi-square was applied to find out the association between gender and usage of social media as a reporting tool. The Chi-square value is 49.135 and the value is significant. Hence the hypothesis (**H<sub>1</sub>**) is accepted.

Overall majority of the respondents use social media as a reporting tool.

### **Social media and reliability**

**Table No. 3**  
**Reliability of news and information delivered via social media**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>A lot More Reliable</b>	<b>Slightly More Reliable</b>	<b>Moderately Reliable</b>	<b>Slightly Less Reliable</b>	<b>Much Less Reliable</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	49 (9.8)	71 (14.2)	114 (22.8)	39 (7.8)	39 (7.8)	312 (62.4)
Female	41 (8.2)	50 (10.0)	54 (10.8)	25 (5.0)	18 (3.6)	188 (37.6)

<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b> <b>(18.0)</b>	<b>121</b> <b>(24.2)</b>	<b>168</b> <b>(33.6)</b>	<b>64</b> <b>(12.8)</b>	<b>57</b> <b>(11.4)</b>	<b>500</b> <b>(100.0)</b>
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As depicted in the **Table No. 3**, the study shows that 33.6 per cent of respondents rated that news and information delivered via social media are moderately reliable, whereas 24.2 per cent of respondents said it is slightly more reliable. 18 per cent of respondents feel content on social media is a lot more reliable, whereas 12.8 per cent of respondents rated that news and information delivered via social media are slightly less reliable. A total of 11.4 per cent of respondents rated that it was much less reliable.

Gender wise classification depicts that 22.8 per cent of male respondents and 10.8 per cent of female respondents rated that news and information delivered via social media are moderately reliable whereas 14.2 per cent of male respondents and 10 per cent female respondents said it is slightly more reliable.

It is interesting to note that a majority of the respondents rated news or information delivered via social media as moderately reliable followed by 24.2 per cent of respondents who said it is slightly more reliable.

**Table No. 4**  
**Utilising content from social media without verifying**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	35 (7.0)	255 (51.0)	22 (4.4)	312 (62.4)
Female	28 (5.6)	139 (27.8)	21 (4.2)	188 (37.6)
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b> <b>(12.6)</b>	<b>394</b> <b>(78.8)</b>	<b>43</b> <b>(8.6)</b>	<b>500</b> <b>(100.0)</b>

Verification of content that appeared on social media is a cumbersome task. Social media has triggered a proliferation of fake news by amplifying fabricated stories in a way that has never happened before. A journalist has to verify the content before publishing on mainstream media.

**Table No. 4** reveals more than three fourth of the respondents have not published, telecast, broadcast any content from social media without verifying.

**Table No. 5**  
**Verifying the authenticity of the content on social media**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Very Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Almost Never</b>	<b>Never</b>
Contact the person who posted it originally	260 (52.0)	111 (22.2)	90 (18.0)	15 (3.0)	24 (4.8)
Geo tagging of the photographs	135 (27.0)	113 (22.6)	134 (26.8)	44 (8.8)	74 (14.8)
Use various web tools to verify	221 (44.2)	78 (15.6)	135 (27.0)	23 (4.6)	43 (8.6)
Cross check with fellow journalists	185 (37.0)	127 (25.4)	142 (28.4)	24 (4.8)	22 (4.4)

Verification is the keyword while adopting social media in newsrooms. Because, the content which is not verified by the journalists may pose a grave challenge to the credibility of media houses. Many a time, it may invite the legal issues of defamation charges. Therefore, verifying before publishing any content is very much important.

As observed in the **Table No. 5**, the study shows the various ways of verification of the authenticity of content posted on social media. One way of verifying the social media content is to contact the person who posted it originally. A vast majority of the respondents i.e. 52 per cent said that they always contact the person who posted the content originally, while 22.2 per cent of respondents very often do this. Only a small percentage i.e.18 per cent of respondents do it sometimes, and 4.8 per cent of the respondents never contact the person who posted the content originally. Only 3 per cent of respondents almost never contact the person who posted the content originally through messages or calls.

Another way of verification is to check the geotagging of the photographs or any content on social media. Geotagging has become a popular feature on several social media platforms. The map layout pinpoints specific photos that the user has taken on a world map.

As observed in the above table, a total of 27 per cent of respondents always check geo-tagging of the content on social media while 26.8 per cent of them sometimes check geo-tagging of the content on social media. As many as 22.6 per cent of them very often check and 14.8 per cent of them never check geotagging of the content on social media.

Using various web tools is also one of the ways to verify the content on social media. Verification of social media content is playing an ever-increasing role for news organisations across the world. Many are choosing to outsource the bulk of this work to third parties, while others build in-house technology, or spend money on subscriptions to tools that claim to do the bulk of the work at the click of a button.

There are several ways to check the misinformation disseminated via social media. Tools such as *CrowdTangle*, *TweetDeck* are known for monitoring the content on social media. *The International Fact-Checking Network*, a unit of prestigious Poynter Institute dedicated to bringing together fact-checkers worldwide. In India, *AltNews.in* founded by Pratik Sinha said to be first fact checking website.

*The Verification Handbook* compiled by journalists from the BBC, Storyful, ABC and more offers a comprehensive guide to verifying user-generated content during emergencies, disasters and other breaking events. *First Draft News* is a new site dedicated to providing free training and resources for verifying eyewitness on social media.

It is evident from the above table that a majority of respondents i.e. 44.2 per cent of respondents always use web tools to verify social media content, whereas 27 per cent of them sometimes use these web tools to verify the content. A total 15.6 per cent of the respondents very often use web tools, whereas 8.6 per cent of them never used web tools to verify contents followed by 4.6 per cent almost never used web tools to verify the content.

Concerning cross-checking with fellow journalists, a total of 37 per cent of the respondents always cross check with fellow journalists to verify the contents emerged on social media. About 28.4 per cent of the respondents sometimes cross check with journalists, whereas 25.4 per cent of the respondents very often cross-check with the fellow journalists. 4.8 per cent and 4.4per cent of the respondents almost never and never cross check with fellow journalists respectively.

Overall the study finds out that a vast majority of the respondents always contact the person who posted it originally, geo-tagging of the photographs, using various web tools to verify and cross-check with fellow journalists. This is followed by the respondents who sometimes do use these ways to verify the content.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the study shows that media professionals in Karnataka have adopted and utilised social networking sites for journalistic activities. Media professionals too gather news, interview news sources through social media. They utilize contents generated by the users in mainstream media. As social media gives freedom to post anything, the onus of verifying the content purely lies with the journalists.

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