IDENTIFYING THE DYNAMICS OF USER COMMENTS IN AFFECTING THE PERCEPTION OF THE JOURNALISTS AND READERS

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Introduction

• The Web 2.0 technologies changed the process of dissemination of news by enabling the users to produce and publish their own content online thus challenging the mass media in imparting information. With the rapid growth of technology opening to a conversation model (Gillmor, 2004) and as internet users engage more actively in content production the roles of the journalist is changing

Aim of the Study

 Identify the role of user comments of online news in the Mainstream News Sites as a tool to agenda building in the production process and its influence to bring a perceptual change in the society through the online interaction between individuals and the journalists.

Definition of Mainstream

• "The mainstream news site was the most extensive form of news media production online, in general it offers a selection of editorial content either be it shoveled from a linked medium or originally created for the Web and a minimal, often considered as a moderated form of participatory communication". Mark Deuze..

Objective

- 1. To identify the nature of user comments and its roll as a source for generating new information in the space provided
- 2. To identify if such a space has opened up new opinions among the user for the betterment of the society.
- 3. To identify if the nature of conversation among the users challenges the journalists to change their perception in framing news.
- 4. To study the pattern and nature of comments and its influence on the journalist and also to identify if these comments acts as a source for the journalists.

Hypothesis

- Ho1 Users do not utilize the space provided to them in the mainstream news sites to disseminate new information to the public and to enrich the news content.
- Ho2 The user comments does not influence the presentation and agenda of the news organization which was otherwise sole property of the journalists.
- Ho3 User comments does not help the users to participate and debate on issues of interest thereby binging about changes in the society.
- Ho4 The demographics such as age, education, gender, income and occupation of respondents were not key factors in influencing users to express opinions in the area provided to them in the online news forum

Sampling

- A questionnaire was deployed on Survey.com and used snowball techniques to collect data. As this method was time consuming and responses were slow, an alternate method which was non probability sampling was adopted to collect data. The research instrument used was questionnaire and it comprised mostly close ended questions, but also had open ended questions.
- Also the question applied 3 point likert to 5 point likert scale to analyze the nature of users.

Survey of Users of Online News

- The study employed methodological and conceptual understanding focusing on the user's attitude in general and user comments in particular.
- For the quantitative survey, the target respondents were from the age group of 16 to 60 years. Students, people doing business and those working in Government and private organizations were covered. The participants were mostly under graduates, post graduates and professionals.

Sampling....

 A sample of 230 respondents was taken of which 200 respondents were users of online newspaper and 30 were non-users. The sampling technique used was non-probability purposive sampling method.

Content Analysis

- The research applied content analysis on five online news papers which had a good circulation in the printed editions. The online newspapers for the study were, the Hindustan Times, Times of India, The Hindu, Deccan Chronicle and The Indian Express
- (Papacharisi, 2009) argues that the structure and rules of the website affect the ways in which users engage in online discussion. Thus the samples were drawn from multiple sources instead of single web page.

- The samples were taken from June 1 2012 August 30,
- Then first five articles from each of the newspapers websites were selected comprising of 460 News Articles with 7, 36,200 comments. As the aim was to asses the users comments, articles without comments were rejected.
- Further the articles having more than 30 comments the first 30 comments were selected for the analysis.
- The decision to further choose the first 30 comments on the articles having more than 30 comments was based on the research study of (Freund, 2011) which enabled the recording of interaction in the comments threads; a sequential string of messages instead of random selection.
- Another reason was only the first 30 posts were definitely availed in every post. Another distinctive feature of selection of articles was Articles with more than 10 comments were only taken for the study. Thus the total number of articles for the study was 154 articles 4620 comments

. Variables and Coding Scheme

- The coding scheme followed was based on Milioni, (2012), research which was
- Meta Communication,
- Interactive,
- Reactive,
- Personal
- Not Applicable

Classification of Comments

Online Website	Meta	%	Reactive	%	Interactive	%	Personal	%	Not Applicable	%	Total
The Times	643	52.23	160	13.00	269	21.85	87	7.07	72	5.85	1231
The Hindu	352	72.88	110	22.77	21	4.35	0	0	0	0.00	483
The Times of India	1148	40.80	653	22.96	637	22.40	209	7.35	197	6.93	2844
Totals	2143	47.0	923	20.3	927	20.34	296	6.49	269	5.90	4558

• The first Hypothesis (Ho1) was to find if users' comments broaden mass media agenda by raising new issues of public concern. Majority of the users (47%) of the comments of the users posted opinions for the journalistic articles. A slim majority (20.3%) of it was reactive

Analysis of User Comments

Do Comments Raise New Issues?								
	Frequency	Percent						
No (Meta)	2143	47.02						
Yes (Reactive)	923	20.25						
Not Applicable	1482	32.51						
Total	4558	100						
Do Comments Provide Original Information?								
No	3070	67.35						
Yes	923	20.25						
Not Applicable	565	12.40						
Total	4558	100						
Do Comments give opinions?								
No	927	20.33						
Yes	2143	67.26						
Not applicable	565	12.40						
Total	4558	100						
What stance do users take on the content of the news article								
For	3066	67.27						
Against	627	13.36						
Mixed	300	6.58						
Unclear	296	6.49						
Not Applicable	269	5.90						
Total	4558	100						

• These findings authenticate the fact that users do not show a strong sense of participation and use the space a forum to post their opinion on public issues (67%).

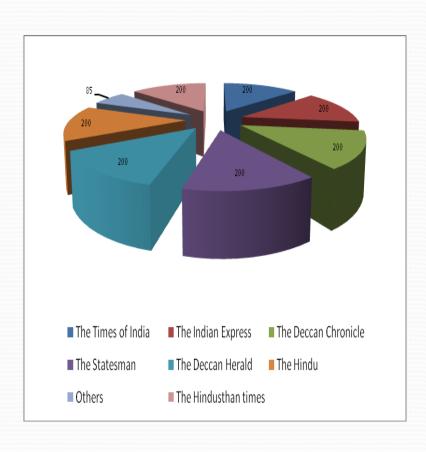
 Another key finding is that around 12.45% of the users discussed personal topics and also used abusive language. • While observing the journalists valence on news articles it was found that almost one third (29.03%) of the articles took a neutral stance and only 15.48% took a negative stance on issues, while most of the journalists take a positive stance (55.48%) on articles written.

- Most of the articles written by the journalists were also episodic rather than thematic.
- Episodic news stories concentrate on one issue while a thematic news story would concentrate on coverage of the issue focusing on the trends and highlighting on the background of the issue.

- Comparing journalists and users stance it seems that the journalists take a positive stance (55.48%) followed by the users as majority of the users (67.27%) took a positive stance.
- A mere 13.36% took a negative stance.
- This shows that the users do not challenge the journalists but rather uses the space as tool to write their feeling rather than raise new issues which could act a source to the journalists.

• The respondents in the age group of 16-25 were only 16.5%. While there were no respondents above 55 years which could be due to lack of familiarity and use of computer technology. A key finding is this study was 37% of the participants were undergraduates and 33.5% had a Masters Degree and 29.5% of them were professional while participants without an educational background were not included.

Most Favored news website



- The advent of technology and internet has seen a steep growth in internet using habits. While the adoption of internet as medium for news is in leaps and bounds in the Western and Nordic countries, the Indian scenario is completely different.
- The findings of this study show that most of the audiences prefer television and newspaper as source for news consumption along with internet and as the PEW study indicate today audience are "Integrators" using more than one source for their news consumption.

 Again the study shows that the users prefer online news more for its convenience and timeliness and not so much so for its multimodality features. As in the case (Chung, 2008) who says of interactive and personalization features are not always utilized by the readers. A key finding of this research also shows that the users favor The Indian Express news site but contrastingly the content analysis shows that Indian Express did not carry user comments.

• The finding of this study also suggests that the online comments of personal nature were found in The Hindustan Times and The Times of India and never in the Hindu. The fact being that the moderation in the Hindu websites were higher in comparison to the other two news websites.

• As in earlier studies not only are readers' comments widely available on Internet news sites, but they are also frequently read: 84.3% of Internet news users reported reading others' comments at least once a week (Na & Rhee, 2008).

 This finding contradicts earlier researchers who have concluded that user-generated comments significantly alter not only other readers' perceptions of what public opinion on a specific issue is, but their own personal opinion about the news issue, independently or in conjunction with other factors (Kim & Sun, 2006). Again the numbers of comments per post were seasonal and not on the popularity of the news article or the news website.

- A content analysis done on this study shows that the exchange of thoughts are not polite, intelligent or open minded.
- This tsunami of online debate does not always fit the ideal of the Internet as a sphere for engaging meaningful and engaging discussions, flourishing debates and intellectual creativity.
- The language used was often not well informed, obscene and vicious. Discussion can be irrational, unordered and reactive with little factual content.

 To conclude the research on interactivity especially the user comments in online journalism, it seems clear that online news sites are becoming more and more interactive, first and foremost regarding human -tohuman interactivity. Users are allowed to contribute to the content production by submitting photos and videos and by commenting on stories and participate in discussion forums. However, users are seldom allowed to participate in the selecting and filtering of news. The traditional norm of gatekeeping is thus still very much in place in the practice of online journalism.

Thank you