



Multimedia, Multitasking, and Multiskilling: A trajectory towards overburdening for journalists in Indian digital native newsrooms

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Abstract

As the reach of news media is increasing, the size of the newsroom is shrinking both in terms of physical space and staff size. The interactive feature of digital media has created many new opportunities for journalists, which are embedded with a lot of difficulties as well. The demand for multitasking and multi-skilling is also at its peak. This qualitative study explores how multitasking and multi-skilling are affecting the journalism profession and journalists. This study reveals that new technological advancement in the newsrooms is disrupting the long-existing roles, status, and practices of journalists. It also reveals that multi-skilling/multimedia has transformed journalism so much that control has been shifted from journalist's court to management's court.

Keywords: Multitasking; Multi-skilling; Workload pressure; En-skilling; de-skilling; Digital native news websites

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Introduction

Since the introduction of technologies, journalism and journalistic practices is going through a great transition, especially after the popularization of multimedia elements in the newsroom [1]. Argued, people learn better from the word and picture together than from words alone, which have also been termed as multimedia principles. Mayer has further supported this argument by research studies that retention and transfer of learning by word with a combination of the picture are superior compared to the word alone. Multimedia journalism is a way of narrating stories through some combination of text, image, video, audio, and graphics, maintaining the traditional tenets of journalism, and those journalists who perform these tasks are known as multimedia journalists [2]. defines multimedia journalism in two ways: first, a news story on a website using two or more media formats such as text, image, video, graphic, animation, and secondly, the integrated presentation of a news story on different media platforms such as websites, newspaper, television, radio, SMS, and e-mail, etc. As Witschge & Nygren (2009) argued that new technologies are changing journalism for better or for worse is still questionable; similarly, multimedia has both positive and negative impacts on Journalism. The convergence of different

types of media resulting from the development of digital technologies has required a few journalists to be "multi-skilled" in order to meet the needs of different outlets [3].

Since the main attraction of digital media is their multimedia features which require a journalist to present stories accommodating different elements and to do that, one needs to be equipped with multiple skills. This has created a huge demand for multi-skilled journalists in digital newsrooms. The concept of multi-skilling in the newsroom is increasing with rapid speed, and it is changing the way journalists work in the newsroom. Multi-skilling is a process whereby news organisations provide training and turn their journalists into multi-skilled journalists who can perform several inter-related tasks. Multiskilling is changing the journalistic culture by focusing on production and adapting content for multiple platforms [4]. Though multimedia stories require additional skills among journalists, readers get more choices to be informed and interact. Due to multi-skilling, the role of the journalist is getting converged, be it in print or broadcast or the most recent digital newsroom. Journalists are supposed to perform several journalistic tasks at different stages of news production, distribution, and consumption [5, 6]. Gordon (2003) argued that web platform-driven journalism affords to

publish multimedia and interactive news stories where they can showcase packages of multimedia formats with interactive elements. In another study of the UK's national news websites, Thurman and Lupton (2008) found that major news organisations were embracing short videos and interactive ways to tell stories online and started establishing themselves as news formats for the web. This multimedia skill also got reflected in their hiring policy of these organisations.

Multi-skilling: en-skilling or de-skilling?

Many scholars have found that the implications of multi-skilling have both en-skilling and de-skilling ability [7, 8]. Multi-skilling as en-skilling denotes the means of strengthening journalists' competence. Having multimedia skills open up more job opportunities for a journalist [9]. Multi-skilling helps the journalist become more knowledgeable about her or his job" [9] Even Deuze (2013) argues that multi-skilled journalists hold more authority over their work as they were capable of handling a set of tasks at different stages of production and distribution. Simultaneously, multi-skilling also mounts workloads and time pressure on journalists, but the problem was not associated with technology or multi-tasking rather cut short in the human resources increases the pressure [10]. Witschge & Nygren (2009) argued that multi-skilling is mainly used by management to lower the cost of production and increase productivity rather than to provide journalists with new creative opportunities. Nygren (2014) conducted a survey of 1500 journalists and interviews with 60 journalists in Poland, Russia, and Sweden: and found that multi-skilling is helpful in re-skilling or up-skilling and not de-skilling.

Braverman (1974) argued that multimedia leads to De-skilling, where journalists get habituated with less creative and repetitive work, which will not help them with any new skills. Multi-skilling also increases the workload as journalists are supposed to perform multiple tasks using different technologies. Yesilyurt (2014) argued that as multi-skilling emerged, journalists face high workload pressure and never-ending deadline pressure. As multimedia is becoming a popular phenomenon in the digital newsroom, the demand for multi-skilling is also at its peak. Due to multi-tasking the role of labourers is also changing in the newsroom; pointing to this change, Compton and [11] explain that "the staffs are required to post to the internet, collect audio and video clips, shoot digital photographs, update live to Twitter". In a study on news production in different media organisations in the US, Kleinberg (2005) find that the labourers of the news industry have complained of extra labour and speed, which adversely affected their skill to carry out the job. Echoing a similar concern Deuze (2004) observes that the labourers inside and outside the newsroom are expected to carry out extra work for the same salary.

Multiple factors contributing to multi-skilling

Multi-skilling is more often a way of increased efficiency than increased creativity [12]. Even in the case of digital media, multi-skilled journalists have to produce news for two platforms like own website and social media pages, and this multi-tasking may lead to more creative journalistic story-telling but also to

growing pressure on editors and reporters [13] Though different factors are contributing towards the adoption of multi-skilling in the newsroom, economic factors have played an important role. In the case of Spain, producing multi-skilled journalists has turned very important, and many innovative approaches and advanced training are being used toward producing multi-skilled journalists [14, 15] argued that multi-skilling is helpful in terms of news production in the digital newsroom, but these new skills are not properly valued from a monetary perspective. While Deuze (2013) argued that as journalists are identified by different portfolios, the professional culture of journalism is getting more diverse, open, and dynamic. The present study focuses on two digital native news websites, *namely the Quint1 and The Wire2*. Digital native media are those media companies that were born and grown entirely online or on the digital platform [16]. It means the website does not have any legacy of print or television news; rather, it emerges first time on the internet itself.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do journalists perceive multimedia in these two newsrooms?

RQ2: Does multimedia have any role in en-skilling or de-skilling journalists?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study, uses a combination of in-depth interviews and participant observations for collecting data to explore the multifaceted aspects of multimedia in digital native newsrooms and how it has led to multitasking which requires the journalist to acquire multiple skills and how do this impacts to journalist's profession [17] also conducted a qualitative study employing interviews and observations method for collecting data to understand how changing nature of journalistic work and organization are affecting the profession.

In this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with ten journalists, such as senior news editor, deputy editor, two associate editors, head news video, business and technology editor, senior-sub editor, senior correspondent, podcast journalist, a sports reporter in the two newsrooms [18] As Argued that in a purposive sample researcher has the freedom of selecting a sample that contains the relevant information and serves the purpose of the study. Respondents were chosen purposively who are involved in multimedia production and perform multitasking in these newsrooms. Interviews were recorded with the respondent's permission and later transcribed with the help of speechtexter.com and manually also. The data obtained from in-depth interviews and participant observations were coded and analyzed thematically [19].

Analysis

Multimedia is overburdening but not recognized

Generally, most journalists see multimedia only as an opportunity to express themselves in multiple ways, but they fail to understand the repressive aspect of multimedia that affects their daily working life routine. In the name of multimedia, they are always

under the pressure of embedding multiple elements in the story maintaining the immediacy aspect of digital media. The deputy editor of The Wire, who had previously worked for a famous newspaper, The Hindu expressed that the issue of overburdening due to multimedia is not only in the digital media rather entered into newspapers newsroom and television newsroom also. There also one needs to file a story by embedding different elements and keep updating the information as the story is unfolding. She accepted the fact that we journalists are under pressure due to overburdening of the work, but we are not recognizing. She said:

It is a problem faced by a journalist from all media, even print journalist now they can't wait to do a story in the evening going to the newsroom and filing a story giving on a particular time. It's not that if a story is unfolding, it's your damn job to continue providing basic info to at least the newspapers, online wings, and things like that. You have to keep updating the stuff on your Twitter account, perhaps Facebook page, so there is a lot to do now, and I would say it's a kind of a burden on every journalist now, which is we are actually not recognizing the burden as much as we should do.

- Deputy Editor, the Wire

The multimedia feature of the websites does put pressure on journalists to learn multiple skills, and the management does expect to learn a maximum skill that can help them in not only producing more multiple stories but also accumulating more profit with minimal investment. Associate editor legal at the Quint informed that management expects us to write the story as well as to do at least basic video editing. He said: They do want us to be able to do video, so if you do video and it has to be edited and the reporter has to do the rough cut. You can't just give all the footage to the news video team and make the video. You have to also learn how to edit the videos on your phone.

- Associate editor legal, The Quint

The Wire's business and technology editor viewed that, in digital websites, one has to do a lot of work because of multimedia characteristics, while in newspapers; so many people are there to work on a single story. Since The Wire is having a very small number of team, so it adds extra pressure on the journalist to perform multiple tasks to include different elements in the story. He said:

I think you have to do a lot more for your story; especially it's a combination because we are multimedia and so there are more components and more elements and also because we are a smaller team. In a newspaper, you have so many people who do so much work for one story, whereas here one story, you have to do everything for it.

- Business and technology editor, The Wire

Associate editor Investigation of the Quint felt extra pressure because due to multimedia, she has to focus on different things at a time. In a digital newsroom, everyone is expected to have multimedia skills where one needs to have at least a basic understanding of handling the camera, editing videos, doing Facebook live, etc., apart from writing the stories. She said:

Multimedia skill you should know how to work with cameras. You

should have that camera shooting skills; you should know why certain issues are important, what all you should record when you are at the spot. What all bites you should take, on-ground reporting skills are required only then you can come out with a good video. It does add pressure because you have to keep your eyes on different things at the same time, even if you are on ground reporting.

- Associate editor Investigation, The Quint

While Sports reporter of the Quint shared that in the digital newsroom, you have to be on your toes all the time, and you are not freed from the work at your home also. Since journalists can access the entire office from their home and organization expect you to be ready to work at any time if needed? He further compared with newspaper and television where journalists have fixed working time and it rarely extended but in digital extending you're working is quite normal. He said:

Even though TV is also a 24x7 medium, it doesn't work as digital media ... newspaper industry is very fixed like everything is fixed; every day you go at 5:30 you leave at 12:30, and thus, the cycle is fixed. In television, also you have a fixed shift. Your shifts don't get extended until or unless there is a very big breaking news situation ... but in a digital news organization the thing is you have to be on your toes all the time because you can access your entire office from home.

-Sports reporter, the Quint

Most of the journalists acknowledge that in digital media, workload pressure is more than newspaper as they have to perform multiple tasks starting from writing the text pieces, editing the videos, recording audio, doing Facebook live, and so on. Even the senior correspondent of the Quint accepted the fact while responding to the question of multimedia overburdening the workload; he said that:

A journalist in a newspaper only has to think of stories or report stories in one format, so then that person can become proficient in writing print pieces, but here you have to learn many more skills apart from being able to write a good text piece. You also have to know how to shoot a video, you also have to know how to use a selfie camera, and you also have to go live from the spot, so you have to understand the digital technology that enables you to do that.

- Senior correspondent, The Quint

Multimedia gives creative liberty not overburdening

Senior news editor of the Quint sees the multimedia work as creative liberty given to the journalist for performing different tasks. Instead of seeing it as extra work, he explained that people in the newsroom are not restricted to one work, and they are multi-skilled, which helps them to perform multiple tasks. This can be viewed that management of these websites are not realizing the fact that journalists are performing multiple tasks in the absence of any reward to them; rather, they express it conveniently that they give creative liberty to perform the different tasks. If we decode the senior news editor's version, it

almost sounds like this. He said:

There is not a single person in this newsroom that only does one job. Everyone in this newsroom is multitasking. They have multiple skill sets; it's not like a person is only a copy editor or only a writer or only a social media person. They have been given all creative liberty to do more than just what their core job is.

-Senior news editor, The Quint

Journalists do feel that multimedia mounts a burden on them, but they are aware of the opportunities associated with it because that helps in acquiring different skillsets while working on multimedia elements which may be helpful in increasing their chances of employability. The podcast journalist of the Quint shared that she only feels burden when more works are given after one another; otherwise, it helps in becoming a master of different skills while working. She said:

The burden I only feel at that point in time because you know you are busy, but generally, if you look at it from a macro perspective, when you realise that you become a master of so many skills as I started as a writer and now I do a podcast, how I did the transition even I don't remember ... It's not a competition because everybody is together learning new ways of doing things.

-Podcast journalist, The Quint

Even senior sub-editor at The Wire expressed that as a journalist, performing multitasks becomes difficult as you have to do a lot of work at the same time. She does not feel that multitasking is overburdening because she is aware of the fact that while working in the small news organization one has to take multiple responsibilities as your organization has budget constraints. She said:

Multitasking is part of my job because we take it as a responsibility ... being a journalist, it's become a little difficult, but I don't feel like overburdening, because here we have enough freedom to say no if we feel overburdened. You feel overburdening when there is over expectation from you and working with a small team, there is always pressure, and since we are a non-profit organization, so there are a lot of financial constraints as well.

- Senior sub-editor, The Wire

Head of the department news videos at the Quint informed that though he is heading the videos department but his role is merely limited to that; rather, he has to actively take part in the editorial work as well. The reason he cited is the scarcity of fund which leads to limited human resources in these organization so one cannot expect a specialist person allotted for one work rather, everyone is expected to perform multitasking, so they need to equip themselves with multi-skills. He said:

So my role is not exactly technical now; it's more technical combined with editorial also, which is the thing everyone is adapting these days. So if you are a good editorial person, you need to have good technical skills also because you are not equipped or funded that much that you will have a separate cameraman to shoot, and you will have a separate editor to edit so most of the people are doing on their own. It's a one-man army, in a way.

- Head of the department news videos, The Quint

Some of the journalists are not considering multimedia as a burden rather, they consider it as an opportunity of learning multiple skills, which will help them in fetching better job opportunities. Sports reporter of the Quint expressed that being a jack of all is the demand of modern-day journalism, and if someone is expertise in that will definitely open the door of getting new jobs at the same time one will acquire multiple skills. He said:

I personally believe now if I go and write in my cv that I know how to edit in audio player, I know adobe premiere, I know how to shoot, I know how to write a copy, I know how to copy data, I don't think, so that is going to be a problem. See, the whole journalism thing is all about being a jack of all trades. So, it's always a good thing in any way.

-Sports reporter, The Quint

Discussion

Multimedia is probably the main feature that makes digital news media different and superior to other media such as newspapers, radio, and television. Multimedia not only helps digital platforms in providing a single story in multiple formats rather it also gives opportunities to readers/users to access the news content in whatever format they wish to, be it text, image, audio, or video. Both digital native news websites encourage journalists to publish more multimedia and interactive stories that can attract more readers by providing the news in whatever format they are looking for, and this study supports the [20], arguments that web platform-driven journalism affords to publish multimedia and interactive news stories where they can showcase packages of multimedia formats with interactive elements.

The multimedia feature of digital media has given birth to multi-skilled journalists where a single journalist is required to produce text, audio, and video and, more importantly, to disseminate these stories on different platforms. And this multi-skilling leads to multi-tasking, which has increased workload and a never-ending deadline pressure for digital journalists. Even [21], argued that in the digital newsroom, journalists are supposed to perform several journalistic tasks at different stages of news production, distribution, and consumption. From a journalist's perspective, the introductions of multimedia elements in the news platforms have both good and bad implications. Scholars such as Wallace (2013) and Nygren (2014) have found that many times multi-skilling helps journalists in en-skilling, where journalists get the opportunities to strengthen their journalistic competencies through Cottle and Ashton (1999) argued that increasing the skill-sets generally leads to an increase in work pressure. On the other hand, sometimes multi-skilling leads to de-skilling; as Braverman (1974) argued, journalists get habituated with less creative and repetitive work, and later on, they face specialization problems, especially while changing their job.

Conclusion

In this study, journalists of both newsrooms perceive multimedia differently based on their experiences. Actually, there was a

mixed response among journalist as some of them see it as an opportunity to explore the different medium and equipped with multi-skills which will be helpful in fetching a news job at the same time it helps in reaching to maximum people by providing a single story in different formats. This echo similar to the finding of Tameling & Broersma (2013), who argued that multimedia skills open up more job opportunities for journalists. While other sections of journalists see multimedia as overburdening, as they are expected to produce multiple copies of single-story in different formats and for which are not paid rather add extra deadline pressure to them. During this study, it was observed that most young age journalists see multimedia as a great avenue to learn multiple skills and increase their chances of getting jobs. However, in the case of aged and experienced journalists, they perceive it as overburdening because they do not want to come out from their comfort zone and strict with their existing skills, which they have possessed throughout their journalistic careers.

This study finds that most young age journalists felt that multi-skill helps in becoming a jack of all trade, which is the demand of modern-day journalism, and it helps fetch better job opportunities. This hinges on the argument of Huang et al. (2006) that multi-skilling helps the journalist to become more knowledgeable about her or his job". As Deuze (2013) argues that multi-skilled journalists hold more authority over their work as they were capable of handling a set of tasks at different stages of production and distribution, many journalists made similar claims during this study arguing that if a single journalist handles the entire production of a story starting from reporting to publishing, then there are fewer chances of losing the essence of the story which is very common when many journalists get involved in a single story [22].

The issue of overburdening associated with multimedia should not be seen in isolation as Cottle, and Ashton (1999) argued the problem was not associated with technology or multi-tasking rather cut short in the human resources increase the pressure. Similarly, this study found that both newsrooms are functioning with a small team, and they are supposed to cover at least all big happenings of the day and should be presented in multiple formats, which force them to perform extra labour. In this study, especially in the case of the Quint, which focuses more on multimedia elements, journalists face high workload pressure as they are supposed to perform multiple tasks for a single story and even the deadline pressure because of a small delay in publishing the story may cause the death of the story and an almost similar situation exists in The Wire newsroom. This study supports [23] argument that, as multi-skilling emerged, journalists face high workload pressure and never-ending deadline pressure. During this study, many journalists attribute the issue of overburdening

to the budget constrain of organisation which bars them from not recruiting so many journalists and this becomes untold pressure on a small team working in this organisation. Kleinberg (2005) finds that the labourers of the news, the industry has complained of extra labour and speed which adversely affected their skill to carry out the job. Echoing a similar concern Deuze (2004) observes that the labourers inside and outside the newsroom are expected to carry out extra work for the same salary. Since multimedia requires producing multiple copies in a different form of a single story, then journalist does need to work extra while producing multimedia stories and this adds an extra burden on a journalist for which they will not be paid a single penny extra which contributes to the free labour as mentioned by [24].

Both digital news organisations encourage multi-tasking and teamwork, unlike traditional media, which works on Taylorist principles where ideas flow in a fixed direction. This is in tune with the findings of Howe et al. (2017) that successful digital newsrooms usually employ a multi-skilled person who can perform different tasks such as reporting, video shooting, programming, graphics designing, and more importantly, can work in a team. Witschge & Nygren (2009) found in a study that Swedish journalists believed that in the future, most of the journalists would be multi-skilled though they believe that it won't make journalism better while British journalists expressed their concern over multi-skilling as it will affect the quality of content. The findings of the current study are contradicting with the findings of Witschge and Nygren (2009) because most of the journalists see multi-skilling as an opportunity to learn different skills which may help in switching to another organisation though many of them expressed that multi-skilling increase the work burden which is sometimes quite frustrating. Through the responses of journalists, editors, and certain observation can be inferred that multi-skilling is a strategy used by management to lower the cost of production and increase productivity as these organisations are functioning with a small team rather provide journalists with new creative opportunities. And this supports the argument of Witschge & Nygren (2009), who argued that multi-skilling is mainly used by management to lower the cost of production and increase productivity rather than provide journalists with new creative opportunities. To conclude, this study reveals that multi-skilling is the need of the time in all digital newsrooms, and one cannot escape from performing multi-tasks. In the case of multi-skilling, whether it is en-skilling or de-skilling, it is still mystifying as it has multifaceted aspects [25].

Disclosure

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