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CONTENTS

Lead article

Gender mainstreaming as an essential part of journalism education in India <i>Gita Bamezai, Aanaya Roy, Anupriya Roy, Shashi Chhetri</i>	5
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Articles

Up for a challenge? Digital practices of 24-hour news channels <i>Karina Chobanyan</i>	35
Undergraduate students and time spent on social networking sites: A study of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria <i>Elizabeth Titilayo Aduloju</i>	57

LEAD ARTICLE

Gender mainstreaming as an essential part of journalism education in India

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Abstract

The present paper posits relevance of gender mainstreaming (GM) in journalism education, which can redress rising gender discrimination, violence, and gap in media ethics, professionalism and journalistic practices. Reasons are embedded in the structural, spatial and temporal aspects of the media profession, especially in the digital media content and practice. Gender mainstreaming framework (UNESCO/ UNITWIN, 2018) has been used in this paper to explore the progress in gender mainstreaming in journalism education in India. The findings are based on a survey of 34 Journalism schools of public and private universities in India for an exploration of pedagogical and transactional practices in gender mainstreaming. Findings suggest that epistemological and ontological perspectives in teaching and research programmes fall short of a consistent gendered approach and are universally sporadic. Any conscious agreement on 'gender mainstreaming' is either restricted to a 'topic' or a paper and offers limited scope of influence on changes in the interpretation of content, gender sensitive pedagogical perspective or diversity of issues in research. The position of faculty on gender mainstreaming does not actually show a deep gender polarization, but such feelings essentially could not change the orientation of the curriculum of the course, their delivery and professional standards. If enrolment of female students in journalism, as part of higher education, has shown a significant rise, yet their entry in the media industry has not dented the status quo of discrimination, or stopped women from deserting the profession mid-way. Mapping of gender mainstreaming in journalism education holds the

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promise of ushering in affirmative policies and actions in changing the media discourse pertaining to exploitation, disempowerment and marginalisation of women.

Keywords

Gender mainstreaming, digital media, journalism and media education, women in media, women media professionals, India.

Introduction

An overall thrust in gender mainstreaming (GM) in the development process to offset disparity, stereotyping and discrimination (NPEW, 2001) has found resonance in the media practice where marginalised gender representation, sexy portrayal and exploitation are salient and persistent issues. Broadly, GM has been defined unequivocally as the process or program for making women's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in the social, cultural and economic spheres (ECOSOC, 1997). One potential reason for lack of progress in the media practice is an absence of GM in journalism education and curricula since the connection between cultural values, curriculum content and socialisation is strong (Gallagher, 2018; UNESCO/UNTWIN, 2019). GM in journalism and media schools has attained a primacy today with an increased reporting of violence against women, cases of misdemeanour by men in the media industry and harassment and risks women face with an increasing frequency both in online and offline media (Posetti & Storm, 2018; Vega Montiel, 2014). As in the erstwhile media industry, consolidation of media entities in the business of network and mobile data has acquired a tantalising commercial and business appeal in the digital media. The neo-liberal logic of online platform companies also implies a perverse confluence of interests that allows regressive gender and other ideologies to be perpetuated (Gurumurthy et al., 2018).

GM process through policy and programmatic interventions holds out possibilities of altering women's structural relations to both media and other social institutions (Byerly & Ross, 2006). Scope for change has remained an unfinished agenda since news room culture and androcentric perspectives are not challenged by alternative modes of practice and learning. A viable approach in disrupting the entrenched discriminatory arrangements in the media ecosystem rests with a recast of journalism education and pedagogy, so as to provide a next generation of professionals with the knowledge and understanding that will make a difference (French et al., 2019). However, an

absence of substantive education about gender issues and newsroom culture in the university journalism courses helps maintain a systemic gender inequality in the industry (North, 2010)

Rationale

Inveterate discriminatory practices within the media have remained unchallenged for lack of exposure of men and women to critical thinking, deficiency in diversity of views and epistemic aspects of gender discourse in the education and training. The present paper assesses scope of GM in journalism education in Indian universities by analysing the existing policies and processes therein and recommends how these gaps can be bridged by using the GM framework (French et al., 2018; Gender Link, 2010; Vega Montiel, 2014; UNESCO/UNITWIN, 2019). Some interesting research studies in the realm of GM provide the context for understanding the symbiotic relationship between journalism practice and education. The paper posits theoretical postulates in feminist and gender mainstreaming episteme to frame the argument on how GM in journalism education can situate changes in policies and programmes through an ‘integrative and transformative’ process.

Pursuit for change, an unfinished agenda

The pursuit of gender equality through ‘visibility, voice and influence’ in the media practice (Gallagher, 2014) has acquired a new meaning and relevance in the Journalism education. An avowed approach in ushering changes in the teaching and pedagogy of gender is a challenging proposition. Scholars at different intervals emphasize an inadequate approach to investing in gender-inclusive education to improve women’s access and influence in media organizations (Ceulemans & Fauconnier, 1979). A large corpus of studies on gender equality in journalism practice have dwelt on the relevance of journalism education in provision of ‘a critical mass’ of women professionals in changing the representation and decision-making process in the newsroom to address stereotyping and discrimination in larger social settings (Steiner, 2009). Worldwide influx of women entering the media industry corresponds to the higher enrolment of women students in journalism education (Boateng, 2017; Densem, 2006; Gallagher, 1995; Golombisky, 2001; North, 2010). Large number of women in journalism schools was best assurance of changing the deep-seated bias in news reporting and to ‘enable profound transformations in the journalism profession’ (Boateng, 2017). Ubiquity of women in the media is deceptive since it hides the challenges women encounter in remaining confined to lower levels

of hierarchy or compelled to leave the industry. These rising numbers, which De Bruin (2014) termed as 'Body Count', do not add up to anything significant, as once women join the workplace, their numbers plummet and continue to dwindle until they become a tiny minority in the upper echelons of corporate media (Byerly, 2011).

A persistent struggle has been with the question of why rising numbers of women in journalism education do not add to the change in their representation in the decision-making echelons and newsrooms (Franks, 2013). Expectation of value aggregation in number of women joining the profession has been short-lived and inconsequential in influencing the type of content produced, issues covered, voices represented and the manner in which women – and men – are portrayed (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Djerf-Pierre, 2007; North, 2009). Women, even with the professional degrees and training, are disadvantaged in the profession since issues of power play, hegemonic and cultural/traditional relativities start acting here (Boateng, 2017). Marginalisation occurs not only through misrepresentation of women and their perspective but also the failure to recognise them as independent agents, apart from their relation to men (Rhode, 1997). Even when more women have followed the formal route of journalism, their inability to contend with the competition and compelling personal factors prevent their bid to reach the higher ranks. Unlike in Scandinavian countries, outright prejudice in other cultures has hampered women's ambitions in journalism (Franks, 2013).

The Nordic gender success story is reflected in GM from journalism education to journalism employment and career mobility (Boateng, 2017). In cultures where access to education is subjected to exclusion based on class, sex and ethnicity, the age-old gender disparity ratio in favour of men in education is gradually being reversed in journalism education by women's access to the privileged space. In her analysis of gender parity in enrolment in journalism schools in Ghana, Boateng (2017) presents how journalism education is drawing more girls while the enrolment of boys is dwindling, a common trend in many other countries in Africa. However, progress in the admission of women into journalism education was not the result of deliberate institutional policies from within but emanated from the state policy directives and international agencies' push.

Routing change through curricula development

More women joining the journalism education and training does not convert to a noticeable change in the gender patterns of either media content or in editorial

decision-making roles (Gallagher, 2019; North, 2010). Not only numbers and positions women occupy would have a resultant change but, 'if more such women populate these spaces with a politicised understanding of the ways in which women's subordination is currently reproduced, and with the will to change it' (Arthurs, 1994, p. 100). Critical insight into journalistic practices and gendered decision-making is possible if journalism education institutions are aware and have the ability to negotiate GM as a means to establish new ways of thinking and doing journalism. Mere inclusion of gender or women issues within journalism studies does not however posit major positive outcome in spite of a more gender-aware education (Larrondo & Rivero, 2019). In their study of Spanish university journalism programme, Larrondo & Rivero (2019) found that the gender agenda was required across syllabus, teaching programme and in research to provide a substantive direction to GM. Challenges in initiating process of GM were at the institutional level, where any conscious understanding of the gender as an issue of critical study was low (Larrondo & Rivero, 2019). In her investigation of the gender discriminatory practices in journalism schools in Australia, North (2010) found a dismissive approach towards teaching and training of gender issues. Since future media persons are trained in these institutes, curricula must include content that educates these future practitioners of media to be gender sensitive in both media operations and content creation. Apathy to feminist or critical pedagogies preclude discussion on different facets of women's role in media or gendered aspects of news-making (North, 2010).

A pioneering work in an assessment of GM in journalism education was conducted by the Gender Links (2010) in 25 public institutions in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Evidence of some beginning was found in a few of the institutions in unveiling a programme of learning skills, knowledge and attitude as part of the GM process (Gender Links, 2010) but significant focus at the institutional level was missing since majority of the faculty were men even when women students outnumbered men. The issue of equality was dependent on a lecturer's own knowledge and on their feminist interests (Made, 2010) while research on gender issues was unknown in many of the universities (Gender Links, 2009). In their analysis of journalism education in Nepal, Adhikary & Pant (2011) evinced how institutional apathy could stymie any progressive effort in GM. Women faculty in the journalism departments had been consistently excluded from the process of curriculum development and board of studies meetings given their low and ad hoc status. Domination of the male and exclusion of female faculty in the decision-making process and curricular development process was evident in the core journalism courses

which completely excluded gender perspective and gender issues (Adhikary & Pant, 2011).

Resultant effect of such gaps in institutional structure and policies are manifested in the type of learning materials and books recommended to position issues from a masculine and biased perspective. Contemporary journalism curricula and textbooks tend to ignore gender issues, that is, legitimizing professional standards and practices invented by men which advantage them over women exponentially (Steiner, 2017). In an analysis of state of journalism education in India, Muppidi (2008) highlighted the absence of critical thinking perspectives in the syllabus across some eminent journalism educational institutions in India. There was a marked interest in introducing technology-related journalistic skills to produce good editors, but not good analytical or thinking skills. Lack of thrust on gender issues in the course curriculum was apparent in an overall absence of gender sensitivity among students and lack of training in gender sensitivity among the faculty (Muppidi, 2008). Media education today needs to serve a broader agenda which 'makes for an active citizenry, strengthening critical abilities and communicative skills necessary for an empowered action and informed participation' (Jayachandran, 2018, p. 73).

These studies provide the context for examining the relevance of gender mainstreaming (GM) concept in the area of journalism education for substantive policy and programmatic changes to redeem backlog of exploitation, marginalisation and invisibility of women 'on and off the screen'.

Theoretical framework

Theoretical contours of GM are grounded in the feminist theories of interrogating the discriminatory and unequal social and economic practices. 'Distinctiveness of GM is that it seeks to equalize gender equality by embedding its norms and practices in the structures, processes and environment' of the institutions. Premise of gender mainstreaming (GM) is built on an enabling process of change in all aspects of policy formulation, structures and systems leading to a transformative environment (Daly, 2005). The complexity of achieving an unprecedented scale of change makes GM an overtly ambitious but concomitantly rooted in gender equality concepts of the feminist theory. Sylvia Walby (2005) defines gender mainstreaming as the re-invention, restructuring, and re-branding of a key part of feminism in the contemporary era. Emphasis on equal opportunities for women within the feminist theory has remained more women-centred without seeking to change deep-seated bias and entrenched discriminatory practices. An analysis or vision of how gender inequality is perpetuated is

a central feature of GM, but it is equally focused on laying out mechanisms and 'activities and/or tools' to attack gender inequality (Daly, 2005). This construct is based on identifying the actors, policies, structures and processes malleable in changing the environment for progressive decision-making and in implementation.

Opacity in how GM can be conceptualised, both at policy and at theoretical level, is clarified in situating it within the feminist perspectives of equality, knowledge creation and normative practices. Rees (1998) outlined three types of models to make the process more distinct and also evolutionary. The first model, guided by gender equality principle, entails 'sameness' in making allowances for women to share with men positions previously considered as erstwhile male domains. This amounts to 'tinkering' with the existing normative patterns of inequality. The second model is an enlightened valuation or 'tailoring' of existing and different contributions of women and men in a gender segregated society. The third model is transformative in nature since it proclaims new standards for both men and women, replacing the segregated institutions and standards associated with masculinity and femininity (Rees, 1998; Walby, 2005). What makes GM revolutionary is that it seeks to bring the process of change from within the institutions which it seeks to reform.

Agenda setting approach for transformative change

GM sets an agenda for change by building support from within institutional framework for changing existing policies and a long-term engagement through 'Agenda Setting' and 'Integration' as two approaches in achieving the process of transformative change. Agenda setting (Jahan, 1995) affirms change in the existing systems (mainstream), reorientation of existing policy paradigms, changing decision making processes and prioritising gender equality objectives and programmatic activities. The 'Integrationist' approach introduces a gender perspective without challenging the current policy paradigm in achieving existing policy goals. Walby (2005) professes that while 'Integrationist' approach spells that gender mainstreaming is less likely to be rejected; its impact is likely to be less substantial. These dimensions contain important aspects of the 'sameness/difference' debate within the feminist theory. In addressing dichotomies in language, feminist perspectives deal with changes in the conditioning and interplay of power and prestige in the language. For example, the dichotomy between rationality (attributed to men) and emotionality (attributed to women) has led to 'valorisation' of rationality to be adjudged as the norm and the 'other' as a deviant standard.

Disquiet with how empirical knowledge is reified as the masculine perspective and an objective presentation of reality, feminists have argued that academic knowledge is saturated with male values (androcentrism) that masquerade as objective truths (Krijnen, 2017). GM, as an extension of feminist critique of inequality, also provides an essential argument of changing the dimensions of empirical knowledge from positivist to Harding's Standpoint theory of locating knowledge in the human experience. The process of such production of knowledge compels an enquiry into who has the power and position, and who is deprived (Harding, 2004). At another level, social role theory of Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood (2012) suggests that human behaviour is structured by social norms and is affected by gendered roles. This structured position determines the particular content of the cognitions (i.e., gender role beliefs) that influence female and male behaviour (p. 459). Standpoint and Social Role theories provide an added theoretical dimension to conceptualisation and contextualisation of GM in policy directives and structural changes within the media practice and education.

Gender mainstreaming as a non-agnostic proposition

To appreciate how GM concept can address challenges in journalism practice and education in India, a realistic assessment of the academic and training programme in higher education is required. In India, gargantuan size of the education system is represented by 993 universities, 39931 colleges and 10725 stand alone institutions (AISHE, 2019). A large set-up of higher education in India reflects gender inequality in access since the enrolment of women in higher education (48.6 percent) still lags behind men but has seen an appreciable rise in the recent decade. Gender Parity Index (GPI) reached 1.0 for the first time from 0.88 in 2011-12 and Female (GER) jumped to 26.4 percent in 2018-19 by rising above male GER, (Pai, 2019). The enviable growth in participation of women in education in India has received attention consistently in policies and has been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society (Ghara, 2016). Commitment in promoting education of girls, is evident in the state policy of treating the education system as an act of deliverance (Sahni, 2018) to 'neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, and play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women' (NEP, 1986). Apart from education, an overarching thrust to the process of gender equity was the formulation of the National Policy for Women Empowerment (NPWE, 2001) which spelled out the scope for gender equality in India in expansive and broader terms of 'mainstreaming gender perspective in the development process'.

Seized by changes in the structural and liberalization policies (post-1991), and technological developments in India, the redrafted NPWE (2016) professes to take the agenda of GM forward and significantly addresses the issue of women's education and gender sensitive curricula to address sex stereotyping. The NPWE Draft policy *inter alia* focuses on media and gender parity in the 'entry of women in the media and promotion of journalism and mass media courses <...> and setting up of women media centres for skill up-gradation'.

Position of women in the media has improved to some extent as it is evident in greater ubiquity of young women in the media industry, and higher enrolment in the journalism education courses in India (Muppidi, 2008). The shift in choices made by women, from traditional arts and social sciences to professional degree courses, especially the management and journalism and media studies, has been accompanied by changes in the liberal economic policies witnessed since the 90s in the country (Chanana, 2007). Blitzkrieg entry of private entities in the media industry in the 90s in India, until then monopolised by the public media, generated an euphoria in opening of the sector through FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and an expectation of attractive job offers for women. Success did accrue in improving the positioning and safety of women in the print media (mostly in the English press) but commercialisation and materialization of digital media have brought in its wake new standards of discrimination and stereotyping, relegating women to the margins (Jayachandran, 2018).

Today, multiple players in journalism education range from public universities and media houses running journalism schools to journalism associations partnering with businesses and non-profits (Desai, 2017). The 'corporatization of media industry' in India, has had an impact on the course curriculum which has liberally emphasised technological skill enhancement mandated by the industry (Murthy, 2011). Indian higher education has been modelled on the western system in its design and curriculum. In line with the US and British schools of journalism, almost all courses in India follow a similar structure and a heavy component of historiography and orientation to practice-related skills but skimming over the ethical dimensions. Within the institutional framework, journalism education has been more proactive in introducing technological related skill formulation but has no cognizance of how digital architecture can further imperil little progress made in GM. Preponderance of journalism courses in the private universities exploits the psychological and employment uncertainties by offering technical skill training to the exclusion of liberal arts approach (Muppidi, 2008). This overemphasis on learning technological skills precludes attention to developing critical perspective in analysis of editorial and

reporting decisions and coverage which have implications for gender equity, its processes and barriers in achieving sustainable development goals.

There is a stark admission that realities of the world to be reported and focused on require a fresh perspective of shaping not just digital literacy but critical perspectives to shape a wholesome journalism. As UNESCO's Model Curriculum (2013) terms it as an effort to chalk out a 'future trajectory of journalism education. Gender in media and ICTs programmes compel a strategic rethink about the centrality of gender mainstreaming in the journalism curricula to deal with gender inequality in the institutions and industries they feed (UNESCO/UNITWIN, 2018). In 2001, the Indian University Grants Commission recommended a model curriculum, program execution specifications, and uniform 'journalism and mass communication' terminology and described journalism 'as a part of a larger discipline (Desai, 2017) of mass communication' (UGC, 2001). But most universities did not make any changes, and scholars debated whether 'uniformity was a good thing' (Sanjay, 2006).

Integrating gender mainstreaming in journalism education

GM in journalism education is confronted with a dilemma in making the curriculum relevant to needs of media and communication industries and simultaneously educating young media and journalism practitioners in creating gender sensitive media structures and content (UNESCO/UNITWIN, 2018). The present paper provides an evaluation of journalism courses in India based on the UNESCO/UNITWIN framework (Media Links, 2010; UNESCO/UNITWIN, 2018). Major dimensions of the GM framework are based on (i) institutional normative framework, (ii) promotion of gender parity in access to education and other resources for students and scholars, (iii) curricula development and course content, (iv) teaching /learning of feminist theories and methodologies, (v) learning materials and research/publications on gender analysis, (vi) research/publications on gender in media and communication. We have adapted the GM framework to determine the institutional response and level of gender mainstreaming in the Journalism education in India.

Research questions

Following research questions were proposed to serve the stated objective:

a) What is the institutional framework for promoting gender parity ratio of enrolment among students, and scholars and the position of female faculty in the academic hierarchy?

b) What level of gender mainstreaming has been achieved in the curriculum development and within the syllabus?

c) What kind of gendered intersectional approach is adopted in teaching and learning of gender issues?

d) Does the gender epistemology guide the research programme/publications?

e) What are the perceptions of senior journalism teachers/administrators on differentials in professional capacities and achievements based on gender?

Methodology

In this paper, we explore the pedagogical and transactional opportunities of GM in the journalism education programme as part of the higher education system in India. A cross-sectional survey of 34 universities/colleges teaching journalism/mass communication programme in India was conducted simultaneously across 10 regions in the country. The cross-sectional survey was considered an appropriate method since it helps in collection of data to make inferences about a population of interest (universe) at one point in time. The cross-sectional survey was considered most appropriate in seeking formal information and simultaneously drawing information on beliefs and attitude towards gender equality issues (Lavrakas, 2008; Mathers et al., 1998). This type of a survey usually takes a descriptive or exploratory form and simply sets out to describe behaviours or attitudes. For the survey, an in-depth-interview (IDI) schedule was used commonly utilised in the survey design and in exploratory and descriptive studies. A range of approaches to interviewing was followed from a completely unstructured one, in which the subject is allowed to talk freely about whatever they wish, to a highly structured approach in which the subject responses are limited to answering direct questions (Mathers et al., 1998). To draw information on skills, knowledge and attitudes of the senior faculty, semi-structured interview schedule was used to lead with open-ended questions and then devised follow-up questions to draw out more specific evidence from the respondents (Adams, 2015). In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with the heads/senior faculty, representing the academic administration, to provide requisite official information pertaining to the enrolment procedure and intake capacity, staffing and recruitment policy, status of gender mainstreaming as part of the institutional framework, integration of gender as a cross-cutting issue in the courses/curricula, and in the research programme. The senior faculty's perceptions were also assessed on various dimensions of gender equality in professional abilities, decision-making and leadership skills to assess

implications for the leadership in promoting GM in journalism education. List of the academic administrators as key informants was drawn from journalism education departments of 34 universities to represent regional, language and media diversity.

The sampled list of the universities was drawn from the public and private institutions teaching journalism/mass communication programme based on the roll of NIRF institutions (National Institutional Ranking Framework, 2019). From five geographical regions of the country, two states were selected from each region based on the inclusion criteria of higher media penetration (based on higher newspaper circulation and TV viewership) and the state as a regional hub of journalism education. The ten selected states for the survey (out of total number of 28 states in the country) were: West Bengal and Assam in the east; Delhi and Uttar Pradesh from the northern region; Rajasthan and Maharashtra from the west; Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh in the central region; Tamil Nadu and Telangana from the south. From each of the ten states, three-to-four journalism teaching institutions were selected based on the NIRF list. A total number of 34 universities/colleges spread across ten states representing public (67.6 percent) and private (32.4 percent) institutions formed the sample for the country-wide survey.

An assessment of GM in the course curriculum also included the document analysis method to evaluate contents of the syllabus taught in the selected universities. One university from each of the ten states was sampled to enlist a proportionate number of public and private universities from the total sample. Following this process, 10 course syllabi were reviewed to ascertain the inclusion of theoretical and skills aspects of gender in the papers, units, topics, and in assignments. An analysis of the reading and reference list was carried out to examine if women authors/writers were included in the books prescribed and in the suggested list; women/gender related assignments in the practical section of the syllabus.

Gender parity in enrolment and academic positions

A wide range of courses offered in the journalism and media education promise entry of well-formulated, critically oriented trained professionals in the media industry. This premise is fulfilled by the provision of various types of under-graduate and graduate courses and research programmes offered by the public and private universities in India. Among 34 universities, many public universities (65.2 percent) and private universities (54.5 percent) offer research-based programmes apart from under-graduate and masters level courses in journalism

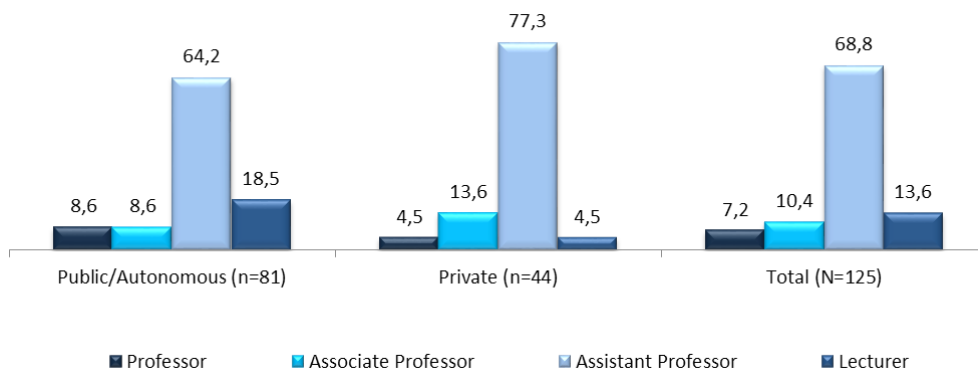
and media studies. Number of female students in universities showed an appreciable parity with the male students. The enrolment of female students was significantly higher in more number of universities (64.6 percent) ranging between 60 to 100 percent, whereas in a similar number of universities, it was significantly lower (30 percent) for the male students. In the research programme, the registration of female research students (64.6 per cent) was more than half of all the male scholars. This position may mask some gendered ground realities since technology-oriented courses drew more male students while female students opted for the television or public relations courses considered as soft professional choices.

As in the case of higher enrolment of female students, likewise, significant number of women in teaching position was indicative of their 'visibility' in the higher education. Within all institutions the number of male faculty (53.2 percent) was more than that of the female faculty (46.8 percent), but the difference was non-significant. As in the media profession traditionally dominated by men, the academia is becoming a big draw for women as a career path. However, a significant number of women as teachers do not indicate an 'equal opportunity' as not many women find it easy to break the glass-ceiling beyond the entry foothold. More number of women were positioned at the lowest rung of the hierarchy as Assistant Professor (68.8 percent), while most of the men held senior positions as Associate Professor and Professors.

Large-scale ingress into the academia by women is attributed to the twin effect of waning of media glitz and the slow-down in the traditional media sector. These changes have had a reverse influence in compelling women to leave the industry for the academia but have been accommodated at lower ranks as an Assistant professor in public (64.2 percent) and private (77.3 percent) universities in the country (*Graph 1*). This is suggestive of lack of affirmative institutional policies in the induction and promotion of women in the academia.

Graph 1

Women faculty positions in journalism education in public and private universities (N=125)



Large number of qualified women faculty with a Ph.D. degree as an Assistant professor/lecturer in all universities indicates a gender blind/neutral institutional policy in an upward mobility in the hierarchy. Similar level of subtle discrimination was in evidence in the academic administrative set-up. Among the senior faculty, holding the position of Dean/HOD/Chairperson, a greater number of female faculty possessed the research degree (66.7 percent) – a mandatory requirement in the academic recruitment procedure-as compared to the male faculty (54.5 percent). Some of the senior male teachers only had a master's degree (13.6 percent) or diploma or a certificate (4.5 percent), whereas none of the female faculty had an educational degree lower than a post-graduation (16.7 percent).

Perceptible gaps in gender mainstreaming in curriculum

A lack of institutionalised and integrated approach to gender mainstreaming was in evidence in all the surveyed universities based on in-depth-interviews with the senior teachers of the journalism departments. The faculty manning the academic set-up majority of whom were men, indicated an uncertainty and a lack of understanding about the gendered aspects of 'inclusion and diversity' across the syllabi. An overt gap was covered with a marked nonchalant attitude amounting to 'use of gender neutral terms', or a customary inclusion in the 'Development Communication paper' with a dedicated unit assigned to 'issues of women's empowerment'. A hiatus in the gender focus in journalism courses is attributed to 'lack of availability of the specialised faculty' and a

lackadaisical treatment is met through a ‘workshop or a seminar on a specific occasion’ (Women’s Day). Perceptibly, gender as an area of skilled orientation and critical study is not considered of any significant value, but merely confined to a topic in the public (87 percent) and private (63.6 percent) universities than a cross-cutting dimension in the syllabus. A significant number of private universities (36.4 percent) did not deal with any aspect of the gender episteme in the syllabus across any of the existing courses. These efforts are suggestive of extemporaneous treatment to the idea of GM by assigning little weight to epistemological and ontological changes in the journalism education (Table 1).

Table 1

**Views of senior faculty
on inclusion & non-inclusion of gender in syllabus**

Reasons for inclusion
Helps in developing gender sensitivity outlook and approach among students of journalism
To apprise students about the existing situation regarding equity and empowerment issues in the society
Reasons given for no additional thrust
In the existing journalism courses 50 percent of social problems which concern women, like health and education are already covered
No faculty to teach this specialised area
Topics are covered during standalone workshop, assignment/seminar, etc.

An analysis of the syllabi of journalism/ mass communication courses suggests that gender as a critical area of interrogation and approach is not high on the agenda in journalism education.

Document analysis of the syllabi suggests that gender mainstreaming embedded in the pedagogy, learning of theoretical paradigms and research areas is at a latent stage across all types of universities, especially in the private universities. Gender as a standalone paper was taught at just one state-level university to form part of the cultural studies specialisation but largely ignored as an area of interest in the mainstream (technical) papers in all the universities. Gender as a topic for writing assignments was part of the syllabi in just two universities. One of the papers positioned ‘women related issues’ under social issues of ‘sex, gender and empowerment’ which testifies to the analysis of gender from a conventional perspective or by clubbing it with ‘the marginal

community issues' in a paper on Development Communication. This approach of segregation and treatment of gender epistemology as an exclusive area of knowledge, with no bearing on different aspects of writing, reporting and research, does not fulfil institutional commitment to gender mainstreaming. The entire premise of teaching of gender is treated as about 'women issues' without establishing linkages with gendered aspects of usurpation of control, access, inequitable power, and marginalisation which translates into a surreal invisibility and silence.

As part of the document analysis procedure, the book-list, as part of the reading and reference material, was also examined to assess the opportunity given to students to become familiar with feminist scholarship and inclusion of women writers to explore alternative perspectives to learning. All universities surveyed showed a persistent preference for male authors with a fixation for western academics. Few of the women authors who found mention were largely limited to subjects such as Advertising and Public Relations, precluding feminist scholarship on multifaceted journalistic issues.

Pedagogical approaches in teaching gender

Among the majority of public institutions (75 per cent), use of gender-sensitive language was considered a more reasoned and discerning approach in addressing gender in journalism practice and in making it 'as an intersecting area of enquiry', whereas in majority of private institutions (66.7 percent) such an initiative was not even part of the pedagogy. Knowledge about methods and processes of gender mainstreaming in teaching and learning was restricted in comprehension and practice among the senior faculty in both the public and private universities. Commonly cited elementary measures for GM were 'use of neutral phrases, common noun for professionals, gender sensitive language and avoidance of sexist words'. One of the significant measures cited was to 'focus on gender issues', but it did not elicit any detailed response. Most of the responses on how best GM can be integrated in the teaching and skill formation converged on 'use of sensitive language and using terminology which was neutral'. Below you will find a list of responses of senior faculty on mainstreaming gender in teaching:

1. Avoid gender bias, words or sentences. Use gender sensitive vocabulary in teaching.
2. Avoid using such terms as, common man, chairman or mankind. E.g., use the word 'actors' instead of 'an actor and an actress'.

3. Introducing gender sensitivity aspects in the classroom makes for conducive learning and 'friendly' environment as well.
4. Avoid any unethical act in and out of the classroom sessions.
5. Department takes care in using gender sensitive language while teaching. Teachers avoid use of any word that humiliates anyone, not only for women, but for anyone in general.
6. Teach gender framing as part of the discourse analysis.
7. Teachers should use gender sensitive language and avoid use of sexist vocabulary.
8. Media students are sensitized about use of gender sensitive language for reporting.
9. Students are encouraged to take up gender-related issues for their projects.
10. Use neutral words like 'cameraperson', 'chairperson', 'actor', etc. instead of male dominating words/terminology.
11. Use gender neutral words in teaching and writing, emphasize on gender-based issues.

Lack of fundamental orientation to GM by teachers in responsible positions suggests that the institutional preparedness in making even elementary pedagogical changes would entail challenges.

Naivety and nascence of gender research programme

The research programme lacked any institutional direction on gender as an intersecting issue of investigation or use of gender disaggregated data analysis for deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Many faculty members had no inclination or were oblivious to the issue of GM in research. Research in journalism studies was cast in a gender-blind or gender-neutral mode, leaving an individual inclination to take up a subject focusing on 'women issues' exclusively. Flagrant gaps were found in denotation of gender-sensitive research as based on the concept of 'gender and development', which entails analysis of a problem in the context of societal differences and similarities based on gender (EC, 2009). Irreverent approach to gender sensitive research was a result of bemusement about non-functional aspects of gendered aspects of the phenomenon in journalism studies. Relegating gender-sensitive research to women related issues falls short of interrogating social phenomenon and its effect on gendered roles and responsibilities. Gender-based differences was found in the research focus where any aspect of gender was treated as women-related and more women scholars were primed to take up research

in the 'gender-related' areas. Consequently, half of all female faculty in both types of public and private institutions (66.7 per cent) were conducting/guiding 'research on gender issues' as compared to the male faculty (40.9 per cent).

Gender sensitivity of media educators: Gender value clarification

Male and female faculty heading the journalism and media departments were asked a list of questions to map their value judgement on issues of gender parity and performance in the profession and practice. Both men and women agreed that women were as smart as men professionally (*Table 2*), though among the female faculty there was near unanimity (83.3 per cent) on the issue than among the male faculty (50 per cent). On a flip question that 'men make better leaders than women in profession', both groups disagreed with the statement even though women had a greater level of disagreement (41.7 per cent) with the statement than men (27.3 per cent). On the issue of jobs and promotions, both men and women agreed that merit, instead of gender, should be the criterion for the recruitment to a job. The statement that, 'women should take up leadership roles' received whole-hearted support from the female faculty (75 per cent) as compared to the male (40.9 per cent). On the issue of 'preferential treatment of men in being hired or promoted in the media', less number of men disagreed strongly (22.7 per cent) than women (58.3 per cent). On the question, 'if intellectual leadership should be largely in hands of men', more than one-fourth of all men had an ambivalent position while more women disagreed (66.7 per cent) with the statement. Major contesting issue of performance and the leadership trait showed differences between men and women responses, but the difference was non-significant (*Table 2*). Even within the journalism faculty contesting lines are drawn but are not sharp and polarised on issues pertaining to qualities which make women equally professional as men in managing and in decision-making in the media practice. However, these views point to the assumption that some women faculty may share similar prejudices and biases and would not necessarily be better positioned to articulate feminist perspectives.

Table 2

Gender sensitivity of media educators

Statements	Scale	Male (n=22)		Female (n=12)		Total (N=34)		Chi square	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
		F.	%	F.	%	F.	%		
On an average, women media professionals are as smart as men	Strongly Agree	11	50.0	10	83.3	21	61.8	4.808 ^a	.308
	Agree	5	22.7	2	16.7	7	20.6		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	3	13.6	0	0.0	3	8.8		
	Disagree	2	9.1	0	0.0	2	5.9		
	Strongly Disagree	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	2.9		
Men media professionals are better leaders/Bosses than women.	Strongly Agree	0	0.0	1	8.3	1	2.9	6.294 ^a	.098
	Agree		0.0		0.0		0.0		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	7	31.8	0	0.0	7	20.6		
	Disagree	9	40.9	6	50.0	15	44.1		
	Strongly Disagree	6	27.3	5	41.7	11	32.4		
A strict merit system in jobs/ appointment and promotion of media professionals without regard to Gender.	Strongly Agree	14	63.6	9	75.0	23	67.6	2.568 ^a	.633
	Agree	3	13.6	2	16.7	5	14.7		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	1	4.5	1	8.3	2	5.9		
	Disagree	3	13.6	0	0.0	3	8.8		
	Strongly Disagree	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	2.9		
Women should take up leadership responsibility for solving intellectual and social problems of the day.	Strongly Agree	9	40.9	9	75.0	18	52.9	5.100 ^a	.165
	Agree	7	31.8	3	25.0	10	29.4		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	4	18.2	0	0.0	4	11.8		
	Disagree	2	9.1	0	0.0	2	5.9		
	Strongly Disagree		0.0		0.0		0.0		
In many media-related jobs, men should be given preference over women in being hired or promoted.	Strongly Agree	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	2.9	5.415 ^a	.247
	Agree	3	13.6	0	0.0	3	8.8		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	4	18.2	1	8.3	5	14.7		
	Disagree	8	36.4	4	33.3	12	35.3		
	Strongly Disagree	5	22.7	7	58.3	12	35.3		
Economic and social freedom is worth far more to women than the 'ideal of femininity' set up by men.	Strongly Agree	7	31.8	7	58.3	14	41.2	5.069 ^a	.280
	Agree	3	13.6	3	25.0	6	17.6		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	6	27.3	1	8.3	7	20.6		
	Disagree	3	13.6	1	8.3	4	11.8		
	Strongly Disagree	3	13.6	0	0.0	3	8.8		
The intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men.	Strongly Agree	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	2.9	3.048 ^a	.550
	Agree	1	4.5	0	0.0	1	2.9		
	Neither Agree or Disagree	5	22.7	1	8.3	6	17.6		
	Disagree	6	27.3	3	25.0	9	26.5		
	Strongly Disagree	9	40.9	8	66.7	17	50.0		

Likert scale: 5 – Strongly Agree; 4 – Agree; 3 – Neither Agree or Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 1 – Strongly Disagree

Perception of professional abilities of students based on gender

The senior faculty was probed about their expectation of students' performance and how gender could be one of the significant markers in making that judgement.

Table 3

Professional abilities of female students in all types of media

	Print		Television		Radio		Online		Film production	
	M (n-22)	F (n-12)	M (n-22)	F (n-12)	M (n-22)	F (n-12)	M (n-22)	F (n-12)	M (n-22)	F (n-12)
Technical	50.0	75.0	59.1	91.7	59.1	83.3	68.2	91.7	63.6	91.7
Editorial section	68.2	91.7	59.1	91.7	68.2	91.7	72.7	91.7	59.1	83.3
Reporting	59.1	91.7	72.7	91.7	59.1	83.3	68.2	91.7	54.5	91.7
Desk	68.2	83.3	68.2	83.3	54.5	83.3	68.2	91.7	63.6	83.3

On the issue of what types of professional jobs girls could handle across various media, female faculty had a higher level of confidence on girl students in performing most of the technical (91 percent), editorial (91.7 percent), reporting (91.7 percent) and desk (91.7), especially in the online media. Male faculty had a much lower confidence and expectation of girl students performing in professional areas since their affirmation ranged from as low as 50 percent for technical aspects in print media to as high as 68.2 per cent for desk jobs (Table 3). Professionally girls were perceived by the male faculty to be more suited for the traditional jobs and bias and orthodoxy persisted against their abilities and performance as professionals. Such gender differences in the perception of women's professional abilities are suggestive of a perceptual divide which shapes learning and training opportunities in journalism education.

Discussion and conclusion

Epistemological and ontological perspectives in teaching and research programmes in journalism education fall short of a consistent gendered

approach and are universally sporadic. Any conscious agreement on 'gender mainstreaming' is either restricted to a 'topic' or a 'standalone paper' in most of the university journalism departments in India. Lack of comprehension about the gender equality and equity issues within the faculty offers limited scope of influencing treatment of content, gender sensitive pedagogical perspective or diversity of issues in research. The teaching programmes even in public institutions showed skeletal familiarity with GM. Commitment to gender was slender and bordered on 'tokenism' (Rees, 1998) since it was treated and transacted as a mere 'women-related issue' in the syllabus. Both public and private universities have settled for a low-bench mark in GM by appropriating the use of gender neutral language in teaching to the exclusion of transacting gender as part of the learning and cognitive development.

Gender parity in student enrolment and faculty position

Higher enrolment of women students in journalism education and training institutions is indicative of the demand for non-traditional professional courses. However, sanguinity about the ubiquity of women students and women faculty in journalism education would amount to beguilement and imperil efforts to unveil the process of change. If enrolment of women students in journalism education as part of the higher education has shown a significant rise, their entry in the media industry has not dented the existing discriminatory prejudices, or stopped women from deserting the profession mid-way. In many ways, the gender gap in the teaching positions and status mimics the media newsroom since women may influx the media industry but men retain their hold on senior and decision-making positions as in the academia. This feminization of academic labour is similar to what women experience in the media industry. Majority of women faculty in both the public and private institutions were placed at the entry level of the academic hierarchy. Women today are seeking opportunities in the academia, since it offers regular hours of work and security, and these aspects are rated higher by women as against decision-making opportunities and in breaking the proverbial glass-ceiling in the media profession. Women entering in droves in higher education may not lead to 'balancing of power' in position or in making judgements since many internalise the socio-cultural normative patterns in their teaching and practice as well. What journalism education needs is critically informed, academically astute educators who understand how issues of gender and power are implicated at every level of society – including in newsrooms and in the content journalists produce (North, 2010).

Integrating gender in journalism education and journalism practice

Teachers have a singular role to play in shaping the contours of the curriculum and demonstrating their understanding and sensitivity to gender equality both within the educational system and in shaping the media practice. Neglect of gendered aspects of a phenomenon can create a limited perspective derived from ‘the consequences of promoting a product-oriented teaching culture instead of a process-focused learning culture’ (Deuze, 2006). A proposal to redeem this is situated in the ‘integrative’ process, if not in the ‘transformative’ aspects (Walby, 2005) of gender mainstreaming by placing the issues of gender epistemology throughout the course content to address the gender-related complexities of the media practice. Evidence of sporadic and random GM in the journalism courses in universities was dependent on an individual teacher’s own initiative than symbolized as an intrinsic institutional policy or process. Mere inclusion of gender issues within the journalism studies does not posit major positive outcome in redeeming perceptibly discriminatory conditions in the media practice.

A contestable issue in GM is dearth of mechanisms and tools for integrating gender in the curriculum and in influencing the pedagogical processes. Another reason for tardy progress in mainstreaming is lack of material and learning opportunities which has had a delimited effect on the way gender has been imagined in the journalism education. Any conscious agreement on GM lacks institutional support in influencing the treatment of gender as an intersecting area of study and skill enhancement, in pedagogical approaches and curriculum development of the surveyed institutions. Consigning gender perspective to a standalone topic or an elective paper in the courses is suggestive of an abnegation of gendered aspects of media profession and practice and its ramifications for the social and economic development. Number of male faculty who held the administrative positions in journalism education in the universities showed adherence to a traditional approach in their valuation of women’s performance as professionals. Internalisation of societal and cultural values which undermine the value of women’s capability was in evidence among women who shared with their male colleagues similar apprehensions about women’s capabilities and professional acumen.

Abysmal level of research overall, and specifically on gender in journalism education is further compounded by misgivings among the journalism teachers about what constitutes gender-sensitive research. A misplaced understanding of the contours of gender-sensitive research has consigned such research to

the 'women issues' category and is treated disparagingly and from a narrow prism. Gender research paradigm is confronted with an opaqueness in failing to acknowledge that men and women have different socially ascribed roles and responsibilities that affect their status in the society (ES, 2009). Opprobrium of gender neutral or gender-blind research rests on their fallacy of ignoring the fundamental principles of research in investigating various dimensions of the media reality and its implications for both men and women. Based on the concept of 'gender and development' gender sensitive research has diverted its focus away from 'women exclusively' to understanding implications of an unequal and divided society based on gender. Appropriately, journalism education courses should be able to engage with a type of research culture whereby both men's and women's concerns, requirements and perceptions are mapped and addressed throughout the research cycle. Ignoring a comprehensive assessment of their research programme, majority of journalism departments have settled for either a gender-blind or gender-neutral perspective in research.

Agenda setting in implementing GM requires expanding it beyond the confines of 'women issues' to mainstream subjects of theorisation, reporting, media ethics and policies in course curriculum since it has potential to allow social issues to escape from marginal policy ghettos and of putting women at the centre stage (Jahan, 1995). Working within the education system, GM is designed to work as a cross-cutting area of discourse and research to end the exploitative systems within the media and outside. An important aspect of GM is intercepting the existing biases which requires 'enlightened valuation or tailoring' (Rees, 1998) of the existing structures and practices by working within these existing systems without displacing them. The mapping of GM in journalism education holds promise of instituting affirmative policies and action in changing the media discourse pertaining to the exploitation, disempowerment and marginalisation of women both as media professionals and in their portrayal. The unprecedented changes in digital technologies are projected to shape a new architecture of the media industry with *inter alia* changes in the socio-economic structures and systems. This seemingly democratic access and proliferation of digital platforms is suggestive of tectonic shifts with consequences for shaping media content, framing of issues and professional standards. These dramatic changes have nonetheless failed to mask the reality of surveillance, ambiguous regulatory framework and profiteering. The push for GM in journalism education is a result of the digitised content transformation accruing in the media industry and the burden of biases carried over from the legacy media.

A quintessential situation confronts journalism education in India in playing an important progressive and significant role in dismantling the archaic status quo and in redefining new gender roles in media practice and decision-making. However, a dualism of approach and practice characterizes the media since it subsists on reactionary approach towards women's representation, their sexualised and stereotyped portrayal while concomitantly upholding repudiation of biased approach to women's empowerment. Journalism education offers solutions which may appear challenging but can be handled incrementally and in a collaborative manner to ensure that GM is about the human development and consciousness to work towards a holistic goal. This symbiotic relationship between learning and practice is being established to address the point that education is the best guarantee in creating new axiom of journalistic practices, decision-making and participation.

India is at the threshold of media expansion but consolidation perversely can stifle diversity and inclusiveness of views and perspectives. Keeping these dimensions of GM in focus, aim is to build constituencies of support to strengthen its educational programmes. The progressive and functional approach would be of building sensitive young professionals with a gender lens while reporting-editing news stories and simultaneously analysing such stories located in a perspective drawn from diverse experiences. This stance is built on a sound understanding of the critical role gender plays in the economic and social change. This enables learning to create and cast such content which would enrich the story and lend it credence and probity. Media professionals who pass out through the reverential doors of journalism education would be primed to look at discrimination, violence and biases based on gender with a sensitive approach since they are placed appropriately in counterbalancing the existing gender hierarchies in the society (EG-S-MS, 1998).

GM is of prime importance in a country like India where the sex-ratio amplifies the gender inequity in social and not just political and economic spheres. Slow progress in GM is due to lack of gender policy formulation within the higher education and reluctance of the media industry to shun the apparition of entrenched sexism and discrimination, especially in the digital content. Not mere statement of gender mainstreaming, but a firm positioning at the centre of course curriculum and research programme has acquired more significance for journalism education in the digital age when trolling and sexual intimidation are rife. The argument does not rest on changing the curriculum alone but paving the way for structural, policy and programmatic actions for an integrative process of GM leading to transformative changes in journalism education.

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ARTICLES

Up for a challenge? Digital practices of 24-hour news channels¹

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Abstract

Nearly 35 years ago 24-hour global news channels proved to be the fast, efficient and popular way of news production and delivery. They re-defined television news and used to sell this product successfully until the spawn of digital era. However, today younger audience prefers to get their news mainly from digital sources. 24-hour news channels are facing the tough challenge, having to conquer the new ways of packaging and delivering the news. This study uses quantitative content analysis to explore the different practices some of the biggest global news channels are using on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The findings suggest that TV news powerhouses are abandoning video as their main specialty on digital platforms and mostly use traditional production formats to create the digital news product. We also come to conclusion that each platform is being used for different purposes: YouTube offers mainly the same content viewers would find on traditional TV; Facebook mainly drives traffic to the company web-site; and Instagram so far is the platform lacking clear content strategy, used for strengthening the brand rather than distributing news. The quality of some video materials offered by 24-hour news channels often does not meet conventional professional standards.

Keywords

24-hour global news channels, digital platforms, digital news, audience activity, social networks, traditional TV news.

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Introduction

In 1985, the world saw its first global satellite news channel, CNN International. By 2005 the format of non-stop television news spawned worldwide. It has been thirteen years since the explosion of 24-hour global news channels was academically researched, documented and mapped for the first time (Rai & Cottle, 2007). Back then the format was considered successful, as there were over one hundred noteworthy 24/7 satellite news channels around the world (Rai & Cottle, 2007), although the phenomenon of 24-hour TV news led to some academic discussion. Some researchers viewed these channels as processes of globalization (Chalaby, 2003; Held & McGrew, 2003; Johnston, 2003; Volkmer, 2003), while others argued, calling 24-hour satellite channels another evidence of Western domination in the attempt to direct world news flows (Cottle, 2003; Thussu & Freedman, 2003).

However, today a lot has changed in the environment traditional TV news is facing. Digital news is posing new challenges to traditional news and urging global news channels to look for new formats and strategies.

Television news in general has traditionally been named the most popular source of information for most consumers (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). Later studies, however, show that younger audience has different preferences. Internet is the preferred source of news for eighteen- to forty-four-year-olds, while TV still remains popular for the viewers over forty-five (Newman, 2017).

The evidence here is overwhelming. In the United States alone, the number of adults watching TV news has dropped to 50 percent in 2017 (7 percent decrease compared to 2016). Most of these people are over sixty-five years old (Matsa, 2018). Studies also show that 93 percent of adults turn to Internet to get their news (Stocking, 2019). In Western Europe eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds prefer Internet as the main source of news and are more critical of traditional news media (Matsa et al., 2018).

Finally, there are new popular platforms like Snapchat Discover and Apple News designed to spread the news, and their popularity among young adults (18-24) is soaring (Newman, 2017).

Thus, the process of digitalization is gradually stealing the main asset of 24-hour news channels – the news – and making it more attractive for younger audience in the new media rather than on a traditional TV screen. The global news channels and TV news in general are faced with the tough challenge of re-packaging their specialty for digital platforms and learning to sell it successfully there.

Another option is significant makeover of traditional 24-hour news, and

we already see some examples in America. The main cable news channels have shifted their coverage mainly to partisan political talk and are showing some audience gains (Gottfried et al., 2016; Grieco, 2019; Jones, 2012).

However, this cannot solve the problem of attracting key demo, which is important for most of the serious players in this industry. They have already started conquering digital platforms: all the major global news channels have their accounts on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. One of the recent studies shows the importance of examining these platforms to understand the new capabilities of traditional media (Shomron & Schejter, 2019). Other recent findings suggest that TV news networks' 'production and dissemination behaviors have not changed in a significant way' (Cárdenas et al., 2020). This research further confirms that this statement is true for most of the channels.

Literature review

The process of adaptation of traditional media to new digital environment has been the subject of several research papers and reports of the past decade (Bullard, 2015; Dyachenko, 2014; Küng, 2015; Martens et al., 2018; Nel & Westland, 2012; Newman, 2009; Sehl et al., 2016; Shchepilova & Kruglova, 2018; Stefanone et al., 2010; Vartanova, 2016). However, only part of this research deals with television and there is a limited number of studies devoted solely to 24-hour global news channels.

Some of the latest and profound data on digital news can be found in Reuters Digital News Project. It is clearly outlining the threat for 24-hour news channels to remain in the past and calling on TV news producers 'to experiment with new formats and forms of distribution if they wish to remain relevant' (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016). It is also stressing the importance of experimenting with on-demand, distributed and mobile video news as the way to get the young audience. The researchers see the main challenge in moving beyond traditional television news rather than replacing it (Nielsen & Sambrook, 2016).

The new challenges and directions of 24-hour news are also outlined by Cushion & Sambrook (2016). Among the most crucial problems the news channels need to solve the authors name the ability of traditional channels to compete with social networks in being first (especially when it comes to breaking news); the ability to communicate with the audience on multiple levels through IPTV (currently barely used); the high cost of operating a 24-hour news channel (which eventually may lead to abandoning news presenters); and the urgent need to re-assess editorial values, putting quality and professional analysis above the need to deliver news at greater speed (Cushion & Sambrook, 2016).

Some of the factors that might help TV news successfully conquer digital platforms are found in clear understanding of company mission, strategic focus, strong leadership and integration of editorial and digital staff (Küng, 2015).

We should also mention some other directions of current digital news research. For example, studying the risks of affecting the content of news posed by corporations like Google and Facebook which provide tools and audience for digital news (Nechushtai, 2017). Or looking at the ways digital news is using sentiment to attract audience focusing on all types of media, not just TV (Kumar et al., 2018). Or understanding the specifics of universal channels' behavior on social networks. This particular study was carried out in Russia and showed poor strategies of the main national TV channels on social digital platforms. Overall, they 'communicate with the audience in an analog way – from broadcaster to the masses', barely using the interactive functions of social networks (Shchepilova & Kruglova, 2018).

Another noteworthy study carried out in Denmark shows the ability of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, to transform 'into user-friendly news feeds', especially for laid-back and nationally-oriented news use (Swart et al., 2017).

However, so far there has been no research examining the niche of global 24-hour news in the context of their activity on digital platforms.

The goal of this research is to find out what kind of practices global news channels are using to adapt their content to the main visual online platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram), how successful they are and what kind of product they offer.

The main research questions are:

1) Does channel activity match audience activity on digital platforms? Are channels putting most effort into the platform with the highest audience response?

2) What kind of product are news channels offering for digital audience? How does it differ from traditional TV product?

3) How much of the digital content is news?

Hypothesis

24-hour global news channels are learning their way on digital platforms. They are using diverse practices – from blind dubbing of air segments to creating a new digital product for different audience. However, most of these practices are still the subject of trial and error, and there seems to be no clear recipe for success. We expect to find that TV news channels are abandoning their specialty – video – on digital platforms and offering more items as text supported by photos.

We also expect to find a gap between the quality standards of on-air and online video product.

Methods

This research was conducted from January through June 2019. We compiled a sample of seven main global 24-hour English-language news channels, trying to ensure geographical diversity, as well as the mix of ownership models: CNN International (USA), BBC World News (UK), Sky News (UK), France 24 (France), CGTN (China), Al Jazeera English (Qatar), RT (Russia). Three of the channels (France 24, RT and CGTN) are state-owned, the rest have private or corporate sources of finance.

We decided to include two UK-based channels in this sample for several reasons, even though the audience of Sky News (102 million households worldwide³) is much smaller than BBC's (440 million households worldwide⁴). First of all, Sky News has been getting the Best news channel award from the Royal Television Society for several years in a row, with twelve awards overall (Mee, 2019). Secondly, it has its own accounts on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, while BBC World News shares all three accounts with BBC News. We did not think it would be appropriate to compare those (much more impressive numbers) with the rest of the channels we picked, but at the same time we could not leave BBC World News out of our sample, as it is obviously one of the main trendsetters in global news television. That is why Sky News, as an additional British channel in the sample, should ensure more objective results of our research.

CNN International is another example of shared digital accounts. Its YouTube and Instagram pages are shared with CNN/U.S., while Facebook account is separate. And again, despite this fact, we could not leave this giant (and pioneer of global news format) out of the picture.

All of the channels we picked are the examples of quality TV journalism. Content-wise they are quite similar: they adopted the format of 24-hour news pioneered by CNN in the United States in 1980, and globally in 1985. They often cover same world news; however, each provides more perspective on the news from the home region. Besides geography, differences lie in the audience size and ownership (state-owned channels can be influenced by propaganda, while commercial channels reflect corporate or personal interests). However, these differences are negligible when it comes to producing digital products.

³ Source: Sky International web-site accessed in June 2019.

⁴ Source: BBC World News web-site accessed in June 2019.

We studied the activity of seven global news channels on the main digital platforms over six months. For our sample we complied a week of randomly chosen dates from January through June 2019. The dates we picked are the following: January 21st (Monday), February 12th (Tuesday), March 20th (Wednesday), April 4th (Thursday), April 26th (Friday), May 18th (Saturday), June 2nd (Sunday). If for some reason the records for some of the chosen dates were no longer available⁵, we replaced it with the next available day of the week (for example, this was the case with RT, where we had to use Facebook posts from May 25th instead of May 18th).

Some of the main methods used in this research include quantitative content analysis and comparative analysis.

The research was conducted in several stages. The first stage included the analysis of the main digital platforms for the channels in the sample. We looked at the number of subscribers and followers, as well as their activity (the cumulative number of likes, dislikes, comments, shares, and views). To evaluate the share of active audience we calculated the average number of reactions and views per post (based on the amount of posts in the sample) and compared it to the overall number of subscribers. Spoiler: the numbers we got are surprisingly low.

At this stage we also calculated channels' activity on each of the platforms, by which we mean the average amount of daily posts. We wanted to see whether the channels are directing their main efforts to the platform with the highest audience activity.

The second stage of our research consisted of quantitative content analysis. We looked closely at the format, topics and production level of posts. Specifically, we wanted to see how much content is dubbed online directly from the air and how much of it is specially produced and adapted for online and mobile viewing (which usually means heavy fonting to tell the story, assuming that people usually watch videos with sound off).

Finally, here is a brief explanation on the platforms we chose for this study (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). Obviously, the news channels' digital presence is not limited to these three networks. Most of the channels are heavily represented on Twitter, some are starting to explore TikTok and Snapchat. We decided to focus on:

- YouTube as the oldest (and closest to traditional TV) online video platform;

⁵ This was never the case with Instagram and YouTube but occurred with Facebook.

- Facebook as the platform with the highest number of followers for all the channels in our sample;
- and Instagram as relatively new, but highly popular visual network.

Results

Our research partly confirmed the hypothesis of 24-hour news channels having no unified strategy to sell digital news so far. Some of the key and universal trends we discovered are:

- YouTube is being used mostly for re-running on-air content;
- Facebook is barely using any video content and functioning as online wire agency directing traffic to channels' web-sites;
- Instagram is the new territory with the highest audience response and mostly original content, however the networks so far do not quite understand their purpose there.

RQ1: Channel activity vs audience activity

The first stage of research involved gathering statistical information on the number of subscribers and followers global channels have on different platforms. These numbers will be later used to determine the share of active audience for each account. At this early stage we could already tell that Facebook is the leader in terms of the audience it presumably brings (at least, according to the followers' stats). *Table 1* reflects the numbers of presumed audience, documented in June 2019. By 'presumed audience' we mean the total number of subscribers (assuming all of them are real), although it includes active subscribers, passive subscribers and (possibly) some bots.

Table 1

**Digital platforms of global news channels
(by number of subscribers, mln)**

Channel	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	7*	17,6	7,7*
BBC World News	4,7*	49*	8,8*
Sky News	1,1	8,3	0,6
France 24	0,8	1,3	0,06
Al Jazeera English	3,4	12,2	0,9
CGTN	0,8	81	1,7
RT	3,6	5,6	0,4

**These accounts are shared with the national channels (CNN/U.S. and BBC News accordingly)*

Our next step involved calculating channels’ activity on their main visual platforms (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). We counted the total number of posts within our compiled week and estimated the average number of daily posts on each platform (*Table 2*).

Table 2

**Global news channels’ activity on digital platforms
(average number of daily posts)**

Channel	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	11	26	4
BBC World News	3	22	4
Sky News	4	30	2
France 24	22	17	1
Al Jazeera English	19	23	2
CGTN	33	31	3
RT	13	30	8
Average	15	25	3

Here again we see that most channels have their highest activity on Facebook (up to thirty posts per day). France 24 and CGTN are the only exceptions, as they seem to put slightly more effort into YouTube accounts (at least by the number of posts). The difference with Instagram for all channels is drastic: on average it is just one-fifth of YouTube volume and one-eighth of Facebook.

However, the indicator we are mostly interested in is the audience activity, which we estimated by calculating the cumulative reactions and views. Specifically, we summed:

- a) Likes, dislikes, comments and views on YouTube
- b) Likes, shares and comments on Facebook (as views are not visible there)
- c) Likes, views and comments on Instagram

We estimated the average number of audience activity per post by dividing the cumulative reactions by the number of posts in the sample. This let us calculate the share of active audience from the total amount of subscribers (percentage shown in *Table 3*). Our formula is close to the standard Engagement Rate calculation algorithm used in SMM⁶, however, unlike the conventional

⁶ Source: <https://popsters.com/blog/post/er-how-to-calculate-engagement-rate>

ER by reach or ER by views, our methodology accounts for views and reactions and thus makes it possible to compare the three platforms. For instance, views on YouTube are by far more important than likes or dislikes. Same is true for views on Instagram video posts. We were interested in finding the way to measure any kind of audience activity, whether it is simple viewing or deeper engagement with likes, comments and shares.

Table 3

Audience activity on global news channels' digital platforms
(N = average number of reactions and views per post, *thousands*)

Channel	YouTube		Facebook		Instagram	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
CNNI	203	2,9	1,8	0,01	285,2	3,7
BBC World News	82,4	1,8	11,4	0,02	399,9	4,5
Sky News	31,2	2,8	0,8	0,01	2,8	0,5
France 24	4,8	0,6	0,1	0,01	0,8	1,4
Al Jazeera English	18	0,5	2,2	0,02	89,8	9,4
CGTN	4,6	0,6	6,2	0,008	13,4	0,8
RT	24,7	0,7	1,8	0,03	15,1	3,5
Average	52,7	1,4	3,5	0,02	115	3,4

As we can see, the most active audience for global news channels (six out of seven in our sample) is found on Instagram. The activity indicators on Facebook are not even close to what Instagram is currently offering. Percentage wise, it is nearly two-and-a-half times higher than YouTube and Facebook taken together.

Thus, the answer to RQ1 shows the dissonance between channel activity and audience activity. While most channels seem to concentrate their effort and produce more posts on the platforms with the highest number of subscribers, they underuse the platform with the most active audience (Instagram). Meanwhile, on Facebook (which seems to be the platform of choice for most channels), the audience activity is under 0.1 percent.

RQ2: Global news channels' digital product

Analyzing the product global news channels are offering on their digital platforms, we wanted to find out:

1) Is it different from TV programming or the same (offered in smaller chunks)?

2) What kind of format is being used (i.e. is it mainly video or photo and text as well)? Is there any special production involved?

The answer to the first question depends on the platform. YouTube is the main destination of re-packaged air segments, which are downloaded without any special production or editing. They vary from short anchor texts to reporter packages, long guest interviews and debates. In case of CNNI, France 24 and Sky News, 100 percent of YouTube content is duplicated directly from air programming. It is 95 percent with Al Jazeera, 70 percent with BBC World News and just about half with CGTN and RT. On average, 82 percent of YouTube content repeats global channels' air.

Instagram shows opposite results. None of the posts in our sample were taken from air. With Facebook, less than 5 percent of posts offered videos from air programming (Table 4).

Table 4

**Digital content repeating air programming
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)**

Channel	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	100	5,4	0
BBC World News	70	2	0
Sky News	100	3,5	0
France 24	100	7	0
Al Jazeera English	95	5,3	0
CGTN	57	1,1	0
RT	48	7,3	0
Average	82	4,5	0

Let's go deeper here on the YouTube video variety with the two channels that fill half of their content with non-air material: CGTN and RT. Their content strategies are quite different. Table 5 shows the variety of formats we found on their YouTube accounts.

Table 5

CGTN and RT YouTube video formats
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)

Video format	CGTN	RT
Air	57	45
Mobile video	34	3
Live stream	8	3
Live event	1	-
Raw video	--	26
Edited natural sound video	--	16
Amateur video	--	5
Security camera video	--	1

Some of these categories need detailed description:

Mobile video – clips that are produced for online and mobile platforms, can be watched with sound off, deliver main information in fonts, sometimes use special graphics. Usually they have background music, which is not essential for understanding the story. Sometimes there are soundbites in native language, with fonted translation. There is no professional voiceover. This format is widely used in news channels' mobile apps. Basically, this format takes sound as one of the essential components of the moving image on screen out of the classical television formula and lets the picture and the fonts tell the whole story. *Table 6* spells out one example of such a video titled: 'Man runs 50 km in wilderness of Siberia in -60°C'⁷.

Headline: 'Man runs 50 km in wilderness of Siberia in -60°C'

Total running time: 1:03.

Background music throughout the whole clip.

⁷ Video can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6zEauR6hc0>

Clip structure

Timecode	Video	Fonts
0:00-0:05	Natural sound (in Russian): 'Odin, dva, tri. Start!' Wide shot with 3 men: two are counting down, the third one starts running	ONE. TWO. THREE. START!
0:06-0:13	Close up of the main hero, snow on his face	THIS IS MOLDOVAN ATHLETE DMITRI VOLOSHIN
0:14-0:16	Slow motion, wide shot, the man is running in the dark with snow all around him	HE RAN 50 KM IN -60 C°
0:17-0:18	Slow motion, close up of his face turning toward the camera	Background music
0:19-0:21	Close up, temperature scale in the runner's hands shows '-67,8°' (Celsius)	BUT NOT TO SET A RECORD
0:22-0:23	Aerial daytime shot, we see the runner's back; snow wilderness all around him	HE DID IT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO CEREBRAL PALSY
0:24-0:25	Zooming in on the runner's picture at the finish line	Same font
0:26-0:28	Zooming in on the picture of a girl (her face is blurred)	AND RAISE MONEY FOR A 4-YEAR-OLD GIRL
0:29-0:31	Video, side shot of the man running in Siberia	THE RUN TOOK PLACE IN OYMYAKON, RUSSIA
0:32-0:35	Video, aerial wide shot from the runner's back as he is running in Siberia	THE COLDEST INHABITED PLACE ON EARTH
0:36-0:37	Aerial beauty show (drone footage)	AND VOLOSHIN BECAME THE FIRST ATHLETE
0:38-0:42	Same shot	TO COMPLETE THE RUN WITHOUT MEDICAL HELP
0:43-0:45	Medium shot of the man running	Same font
0:46-0:55	Voloshin's soundbite in Russian	Soundbite translation: 'It's like going into space – it's freezing and there is no oxygen at all. Terrible. Do not try to repeat it'.
0:56-1:03	Video of Voloshin finishing and falling on his knees (wide shot) Natural sound: 'Bravo!'	MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

No portion of this video remains unfonted, thus keeping the viewer engaged throughout the clip. Another thing that distinguishes it from conventional TV is the edit: most of the shots are only one or two seconds long, which keeps the story moving at rather high pace.

Live stream – real-time video streamed from different events and reported live by a correspondent. Most of live streams (highly popular with CGTN) feature cultural events, new technologies or lifestyle events (for example, street food festival in Singapore, Chinese national holidays, Shanghai’s first 5G experience center). However, some carry hard news tags, like search and rescue mission after an earthquake in China. Total running time here varies depending on the event. The channel sometimes labels these streams as ‘CGTN live coverage on the new media’. Live streams always feature a reporter, helping the viewer understand the story. In some ways, this format is close to a regular reporter live shot in a newscast, however there are some major differences (at least in CGTN’s practice) between traditional television and live stream on YouTube:

1) Reporter skills are much lower on YouTube than on traditional TV. Most of the reporters doing live streams stumble a lot, do not seem to know where to go next and how to cover the airtime, which usually exceeds thirty minutes. Some do not seem to keep their composure on air, with trembling voice and unpolished on-camera skills.

2) There are cases of questionable equipment usage (for example, holding wireless microphone with receiver in place of handheld mic).

3) There are no fonts throughout the long stream, which would help the viewer understand the story better or even watch it with sound off.

4) The visuals and the quality of camera work sometimes are much poorer than on traditional TV. There is no dynamics.

These could be the reasons why live streams on CGTN’s YouTube are not very popular in terms of views and audience reaction (some of the streams in our sample have less than 1,000 views).

Live event – usually a news presser or a speech by a public figure carried out live in its entirety without reporter presence or comments.

Raw video – unedited agency material (in case of RT, raw video is provided by its sister-company Ruptly). These clips carry the element of reality-TV, as they show the viewer unedited, raw footage of various world events (like ‘Yellow Vests’ protests in Paris). There are no fonts or any production involved.

Edited natural sound video – edited version of raw video, usually under two minutes. The only production involves video montage. There are no

fonts, reporter voiceovers or background music. Natural sound may include soundbites. The story is told in a headline and brief video description.

Here is another example from RT:

Headline: *Putin's Russian-made Aurus limo turn heads of German automakers at Mercedes plant*. Total running time: 0:30⁸.

The video clip shows Vladimir Putin exiting the black limo and greeting the crowd (10 seconds), close up shots of the plant (5 seconds), the Russian president approaching the limo and signing the hood of the car with a white marker (12 seconds). There is no additional information apart from the headline and brief video description⁹.

Overall, we can see that YouTube is close or almost identical to traditional TV for most of the channels. On the one hand, this may indicate the fact that they found the ideal mission for this platform and are happy with it. On the other, this might speak of the channels' overall unwillingness to experiment with other formats. Those that do, however, sometimes present unpolished products, with quality far from conventional TV standards.

As for the formats used on other digital platforms, we were surprised to find out that with platforms allowing variety of choices (Facebook and Instagram) it is mostly still pictures and text (YouTube, being mainly a video hosting service, is being used strictly for video by all the channels we analyzed). Global news channels use video clips only in 20 percent of their Facebook posts and a quarter of Instagram content (*Table 7*). The rest of the content is illustrated by photographs (on Instagram), and/or directs traffic to channels' web-sites (on Facebook).

⁸ Video can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6UkHuAJYrE>

⁹ Video description states: 'When President Vladimir #Putin rolled into a new #MercedesPlant near Moscow in his eye-catching #Aurus Senat, the Russian-made ride turned the heads of the legendary German automakers, who even offered some words of praise. READ MORE: <https://on.rt.com/9ria>'

Table 7

**Video posts on Facebook and Instagram
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)**

Channel	Facebook	Instagram
CNNI	5	37
BBC World News	31	65,5
Sky News	5	8
France 24	13	0 (11)*
Al Jazeera English	16	14
CGTN	35	25
RT	43	41
Average	21	27 (29)*

**Our sample of France 24 Instagram posts contained no video materials on the dates we randomly picked. However, looking at the account it is easy to spot some video posts. We counted on average 11 out 100 (11%). That is why the average percentage indicator in the last graph contains two numbers to reflect this discrepancy.*

Among the examined video posts, we found several formats the channels are using on Instagram and Facebook, particularly: live streaming, clips produced specifically for online and mobile platforms (mobile videos), air segments, raw agency material, etc.

With Instagram all video content can be divided into three main categories: mobile videos (50 percent), unfonted natural sound videos (32 percent) and IGTV videos (18 percent). While mobile videos format here is same as on YouTube, unfonted natural sound videos vary from edited soundbites to raw footage (of severe weather, emotional rescue, protests, etc). To understand the story the viewer needs to read the text in the post and/or to turn sound on. IGTV (Instagram TV) can use both formats, fonted and unfonted, but presumes that the clip is longer than one minute and those who choose to continue watching it, will automatically get the sound on.

There is one important thing with Instagram videos in global news channels' accounts that makes them stand out. While video editing is usually dynamic and done exactly to match the fonts and tell the story, most of these clips are not shot for this platform. The clips in our sample often lack proper framing: the application square-frames the shot automatically, cutting essential details out of the picture (for example, sometimes in close-up shots faces of speakers are only partially visible). This 'roughness', however, can also be a factor of viewer

attraction: the video stands out and catches the eye because it looks amateurish rather than professional.

So, on Instagram, just like on YouTube, we find a mix of professional and sub-professional quality of video material.

With Facebook there is more variety of video formats. The most popular are: unfonted natural sound videos (37 percent), air segments (18 percent), live streams (used only by CGTN, 17 percent), raw agency material (used only by RT, 14 percent), mobile videos (11 percent). Other 3 percent includes promo clips, live events and special formats (like, for example, RT Play). We also found out that channels use different practices here, and there is no universal recipe for filling video content on Facebook.

Some (like CNNI) post only air segments (thus duplicating some of their YouTube content), some put more effort into producing mobile video content (Al Jazeera). RT and CGTN seem to experiment with the widest variety of video formats. RT, which owns Ruptly news agency, likes to post its raw footage of world events. CGTN here too is experimenting with live streaming format which covers different cultural events in China and airs across main digital platforms (however, despite its popularity with the channel, it does not get high viewer response).

Overall, we can say that only 25 percent of video content on Facebook and Instagram (18 percent on Instagram and 7 percent on Facebook) goes through special production and adaptation for online viewing. This number seems quite low for broadcast news powerhouses which are supposed to set high standards in video production. One of the reasons could be the shortage of human resources needed to repack these items for online consumption. Another – the traditional way of news production meant to be delivered to consumer's living-room via TV screen with anchor commentary and sound on.

RQ3: Is it news?

Do news channels offer news on their online platforms or delve into other territories in order to attract the audience? Part of our content-analysis was devoted to finding news items (hard news and soft news) and estimating their ratio in the total volume of our sample.

Overall, as we found out, it is digital news product. However, it varies for each platform. Here again YouTube and Facebook seem to have similar strategies, while Instagram stands aside.

The average share of news, both hard and soft, on YouTube is about 95 percent, for Facebook it is 93 percent. Most of this product consists of hard

news (76 percent for YouTube and 67 percent for Facebook)¹⁰. As for the remaining items, which we categorized as ‘not news’, they consisted of commentary, promos, fun animal video or beauty shots of nature, as well as various best/worst lists with no particular news tag.

With Instagram things are different. The ratio of news is the lowest here – 83 percent, and the amount of ‘not news’ is the highest. We can also note that the amount of hard news and soft news is almost even, making Instagram the leading platform in terms of soft news (*Table 8*).

Table 8

**News vs not news
(ratio to the total number of posts in the sample, %)**

Platform	Hard news	Soft news	Not news
YouTube	76	19	5
Facebook	67	26	7
Instagram	44	39	17

Here are some of the examples of Instagram posts we put in the ‘not news’ category: squirrel is playing with a kitten (BBC News, April 26th), Oscar ceremony coverage promo (Al Jazeera, February 12th), viral video of a gorilla standing like a human (CGTN, April 26th), promo of guest interview (France 24, February 12th), etc.

Overall, though it is quite obvious that most of the product global news channels are offering online falls into the news category. While YouTube and Facebook prove to be the destinations mostly for hard news, Instagram is offering more features, human stories and various soft news than other platforms. It also has a lot more items that we could not place in any of the news categories.

Conclusions

To sum up, we can state that our hypothesis was mostly verified, as there is no universal strategy that global news channels are using to sell their product. However, the fact that they are not blindly dubbing air shows to YouTube, Facebook and Instagram and are trying different approaches to supply content to their digital platforms leads us to argue that they are in the game to gain online audience.

¹⁰ In categorizing hard and soft news we followed the approaches of E. J. Whetmore, as well as Y. Limor and R. Mann, reviewed by Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig & Michal Seletzky (2010).

While some of the practices are still the result of trial and error, there are some accepted ‘missions’ for each digital platform: YouTube is being used by the channels mostly as on-demand, online TV screen (which mainly duplicates segments taken from air), Facebook – as wire agency to drive traffic to the channels’ sites, and Instagram so far for most channels is the unconquered territory, seen as the place for mostly soft news items. While YouTube remains video-only platform, Facebook is shifting away from the moving image essence of television product towards print format of still images and text. Almost 80 percent of its content is text-based, and it offers little to none original video content.

Instagram stands out as the only platform which does not duplicate any of the air programming and offers the most original content in different formats. Video content here is usually targeted for online audience: it tells the story in fonts, showcases only the best emotional moments in available footage, presents strong soundbites and appealing photos. It is obvious though that channels are still learning to communicate with the viewer on this platform, as the quality of footage in some cases looks amateurish.

Another reason to believe that Instagram is still a trial territory for the global news channels is the fact that video posts get high audience reaction while making up only 20 percent of the content. The diversity of topics here leads us to suggest that the channels are not fully understanding their aims and scope with this social network.

Our research shows that Instagram, currently underused and underestimated, has the potential to attract the most active audience. Furthermore, a quick check of Instagram subscriber rates in January 2020 shows (on average) 30 percent growth. Same check of Facebook subscriber rates growth showed growth under 6 percent.

The findings show that most of the product offered on digital platforms is still news, with strong prevalence of hard news on YouTube and Facebook and mild on Instagram. However, when it comes to video, TV-powerhouses surprisingly show either lack of quality (as in CGTN’s live streams) or lack of understanding of how video is consumed online (less than half of posts are fully adapted for online viewing and use special production techniques). Although, we can suggest that this can be partly due to lack of financial or human resources.

These results should be viewed as the start of a wider research effort, involving other significant platforms and in-depth analysis of audience preferences.

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<https://www.facebook.com/cnninternational/>

<https://www.facebook.com/bbcnews/>

<https://www.facebook.com/RTnews/>

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Undergraduate students and time spent on social networking sites: A study of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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Abstract

Social media sites allow students particularly in tertiary institutions to adopt different types of social networking sites to interact; keep in touch with their families and friends and keep up with their academic assignments. Conversely, there has been a growing concern that students at the tertiary level in Nigeria have devoted much of their time to communication through social networking sites at the expense of serious academic work. Thus, the study investigated how the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria make use of social media sites for academic purposes. It also examined how much time the students allotted to socialisation and academic work in the use of online media. Anchored on the Uses and Gratification Theory, the survey research design was adopted while questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collections. Data were generated from a sample of 600 respondents randomly selected from six faculties from the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Findings showed that most undergraduate students devoted more time to social networking sites mainly for socialisation and only used the sites for academic purposes when they were given assignments or when researching on a particular topic. The findings also revealed that the length of time spent on social networking sites socialising reduced the respondents' ability to concentrate on academic work and eventually led to poor performance of undergraduate students. Based on the findings and conclusion, it was recommended among others, that media literacy education as a course should be introduced and integrated into the tertiary institutions' programmes, especially at the undergraduate level.

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Keywords

Academic work, social media, social networking sites, socialisation, undergraduate students, youth.

Introduction

The twenty-first century is characterised by a high degree of technological advancement and innovation. Now a part of our everyday life, social media and social networking sites have radically altered the way we communicate and interact with one another. Over the years, various household technologies have made their way into homes and have greatly changed the way people live, learn, work and more importantly, the way they spend their leisure time. People had only just begun to settle into the Internet revolution when the key social media platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and YouTube, Whatsapp, Viber changed the face of new media once more. The social media sites – Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, online gaming environments and other tools – according to Zanamwe et al. (2013) have served as a benefit to mankind especially the youth in Nigeria. They have provided people with exposure to the world outside their immediate environment.

Social media have served as platforms to voice people's opinions on all sorts of academic, social and political issues and shared information with one another. They brought easy ways of communication and provided people with easily accessible means to reach out to others in various parts of the world. It allows the students generally and students in tertiary institutions particularly to adopt different types of social networking sites to interact; keep in touch or relate to their families and friends and keep up with their academic assignments. According to Akubugwo & Burke (2013), the advancement in technology would create a favourable impact on students' academic work or learning environment. Nevertheless, Rosen (2007) argued that most of these students spend their time, swimming in the ocean of 'social media diet', accumulating jobs with the overtime, enjoying different types of entertainment, social interaction with all sorts of electronic media technologies.

According to Al-Ammari (2004), students generally have integrated part of their lifestyle with social media, in other words, social networking sites have virtually turned to communal set up where they interact and share information, store and keep their relationships updated, on a daily basis. However, the negative influence of these sites as a result of an overexposure and excessive time spent on social networking sites affect their academic work. Thus, there has been a growing concern that students at the tertiary level in Nigeria have

devoted much of their time to communicating through social media at the expense of serious academic work.

In the last ten years, the online world has changed dramatically. Currently, there has been an overwhelming increase interest in the use of social networking sites among the university students in Nigeria with the emphasis on developing their media competencies. Thanks to the invention of social media, young people now exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos at an amazing rate. However, many undergraduate students are spending countless hours immersed in social media, such as Facebook, Myspace, WhatsApp, Twitter and many others, socialising at the detriment of serious or academic events (Wang et al., 2011).

As observed, today's students prefer going online and socialising with friends quite often to reading books and doing research. Little wonder that the academic performances of the undergraduate students in Nigeria were dwindling compared to twenty years ago when most students spent their time in the library and their money on relevant books. It is believed that there are negative effects of social media on the undergraduate students as regards the amount of time spent on socialisation compared to their academics. In other words, excessive time on social networking sites may have an adverse effect on the students' academic performances. Therefore, this study examines the purpose of using social media sites, the amount of time spent on socialisation and academics and the effects on academic performances of undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Research questions are the following:

- i. What is the most preferred and used social networking sites by the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt?
- ii. How often do undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt use social networking sites?
- iii. What is the length of time the undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt access and use the social networking sites daily?
- iv. For what purpose do the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt utilise the social media networking sites?
- v. What is the effect of excessive time spent on social networking sites on the academic performances of undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt?

It is necessary to study this sector of the university students because of the negative impact of the social media on the academic performances of the undergraduate students in Nigeria that is greatly noticed. Despite the fact the

university students are heavy users of the social media because most of them have access to mobile phones, tablets, computers and the Internet, most of them lack proper orientation on how to use the social media to boost or aid their academic activities and performances. More so, over one million Nigerian young people are on Facebook (Facebook Statistics, 2010) which is one of the most popular social media web-sites in Nigeria. The high level of usage and excessive time spent on social media are perceived as distraction and may be responsible for the dwindling of their academic performances. Thus, the study argues that if undergraduate students of the university of Port Harcourt in particular and Nigeria in general are properly oriented, they can correctly engage and utilise the social networking sites on worthwhile events to improve their learning processes.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (GUT) developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974 (Anaeto et al., 2008). Although, according to Baran (1995), 'The Uses and Gratification theory has its origin in the early audience studies of radio series in the 1920's'. However, the theory actually became empirical in the early 1940's when Lazarsfeld, Sharron and Berelson commenced an empirical investigation into the theory. The UGT is an effect theory that strives to examine and evaluate the effect of the media on the users. Therefore, it considers the audience as active, that is, they actively seek out specific media and content to achieve certain results or gratifications that satisfy their personal needs (Nayyar, 2007).

Its emphasis is on what people do with the media rather than what the media do to their audiences. The theory stresses the fact that the audiences are not passive receivers of the media contents, but that, 'they actively influence the message' in that they 'selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain the media message on the basis of their needs, beliefs, etc.' (Anaeto et al., 2008). Popoola (2011) also claimed that the effect the media have on their audiences reflects in various things people do, in different ways they use the media and in the ways it affects their attitudes and life perception. Obviously, some media help people achieve their goals, but it depends on the media type and people's interests.

However, citing Blumler & Gurevitch, Popoola (2011) posited that they are five basic assumptions guiding the UGT. The assumptions are:

- (i) The audience is conceived as active.
- (ii) Media choice and gratifications depend on the audience member, that

is, people use media to their advantage more often than the media use them.

(iii) The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction especially face-to-face communication.

(iv) Many of the goals media use can be derived from data supplied by the individual audience members themselves.

(v) It is the individual audience member that makes the decision to view the media based on the value placed on such media.

Based on these assumptions and presumptions of the UGT, one can say that individuals will make their choice of medium/media based on the benefit they are likely to get from whatever choice they make. In other words, the audience members selectively engage media that can meet their needs or satisfy them at any point in time. Thus, according to Adaja & Ayodele (2013), it is not the prevalence or popularity of the medium or media that matters but the relevance and utility of the medium/media to the user.

Literature review

As defined by Powell (2009), a social networking site is a community in which individuals are somehow connected through friendship, values, working relationships, ideas and so on. Similarly, Ayiah and Kumah (2011) perceived social networking site as any web-site designed to allow multiple users to publish their own content. The information may be on any subject and may be for consumption by friends, mates, employers, employees, etc. Social media and social networking are no longer in their infancy. In other words, they have come of age. Nielsen (2012) reported that since the emergence of the first social media networks more than twenty years ago, social media have continued to evolve and offer users around the world new and meaningful ways to engage with people, events and brands that matter to them. Even now, years later, the social media are still growing rapidly and have become an integral part of contemporary people's daily lives.

Currently, social networking can be said to have become a truly global phenomenon. It is one aspect of social media in which individuals are in communities that share ideas, interests, or are looking to meet people with similar ideas and interests. This includes but is not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Instagram and Myspace, as well as the inaugural social networking sites of Cyworld, Bebo and Pinterest.

Most students are thrilled to have social media as a big part of their daily experiences. These media are immensely popular among children and young people, as evidenced by the nearly ubiquitous use of Facebook and the growing

popularity of Twitter (Moreno & Kota, 2014). Specifically, students in the higher institutions of learning adopt different types of social media communication as the utmost medium to interact, keep in touch or relate to their family and friends (Flad, 2010). According to Flad (2010), social media sites like Facebook and Myspace are among the most popular sites that students mostly spend their time in. Presently, students are more concerned about how many friends they have on social networking sites, how many contacts they have on their mobile phones, how many followers on Twitter or likes on Facebook, etc. Confirming this, Facebook Statistics report that the average number of 'friends' Facebook users have is 120, while mobile phone SIM cards can store about 200 contacts. Unfortunately, out of these, they communicate with some often, with others very rarely, while some of these so-called friends or followers they have never met or spoken with (Siapera, 2012).

No doubt, the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt have embraced the use of social media technology and have become a major part of their everyday lives. In this way, the boundaries between online and 'real world' communities are rapidly broadening, if not completely deteriorating. Particularly, as older people now consider this generation as whom such social media technology exchanges have existed their entire lives, therefore, there is a fluid interchange between digital and physical experiences (Davis III et al., n.d). For this contemporary generation, social media have become a primary means of communication and information seeking, and possibly, a central component of their identity and community building.

On the one hand, social media sites help increase and aid students' academic performances through interactions. These sites encourage continuous learning, as they save time, cut down travel cost as well as convenience compared to traditional ways of learning. University students today can read resources online and interact with other peers and lecturers anytime and anywhere. The benefit of using social networking sites anytime, anywhere, according to Hrastinski (2009), is that students who have restrictions either from work or family engagement can still take part in learning since they allow people to get information or interact with other students online. Also, online group work gives students the opportunity to work with new people from diverse backgrounds to discuss and acquire new knowledge without meeting them in person (Curtis & Lawson, 2001).

Lederer, (2012) further outlined the benefits of utilising social networking sites for learning in colleges and universities as:

- i) The sites help students to increase their engagement and in building their

communication skills by enabling them to feel more comfortable expressing themselves in a less intimidating environment.

ii) They improve the communication between the students and lecturers. The lecturers can provide the media contents of the course, post their assignments, lecture notes, message updates, announcements on upcoming events and other web and multimedia contents.

iii) The students also use social media networking sites for job hunting, where they post a resume and search for potential employers.

iv) Social networking sites also offer students collaborative environments in which they can interact with other students or teachers to enhance their academic work.

The implication of these benefits is that through social networking sites, the communication between students and lecturers can be enhanced in such a way that knowledge and information flow become easier and faster.

On the other hand, Arnold & Paulus (2010) argued that, although social networking sites have been used for academic purposes, the students still use these sites in a manner that vary from these motives. For instance, off-topic discussions that are non-academic take place on social media by the students. Regrettably, students continue to spend more and more time on social networking sites for a purpose not related to their academic work which can make them unproductive. In fact, excessive Internet use may cause parts of youth's brain to waste away. This could also affect their concentration and memory, as well as their ability to make decisions and set goals. It could also lead to 'inappropriate' behaviour (Arnold & Paulus, 2010).

Also, excessive use of the social networking can have a damaging effect on the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of the students. Lin et al. (2013) argued that as the age of students increases, the rate of off-topic discussions gets higher. This indicates that only mature students are likely to spend more time on social networking for the discussion related to the course contents, while younger ones may likely engage in non-course related discussion. To ascertain this, Hunley et al. (2005) carried out a study that proved that the time spent on the computers at home affects the Grade Point Average (GPA) of students' results.

Vanden-Boogart (2006) also observed that Facebook users (social media users) have lower GPAs than average. In the same vein, Flad (2010) in a study on the effect of social media on students' academic work found that 32% out of 35% of the students that used social media have poor results in their academic work mainly because most of them did not finish their assignments

and homework. Thus, the fact remained that, although social media is good for students to socialise with friends, it has a negative impact on their academic work. Nevertheless, if social networking sites are properly engaged and utilised by the university students, they have the potential to improve the learning process of the students by allowing them to exchange ideas, promote collaborations and discussions, engage and interact with the online discussion.

Methodology

A survey design was adopted for this study. This was considered appropriate design for this work because students' opinions were the main source of data collection. The population of the study comprises all the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt. According to Okoro (2006), 'population in research <...> stands for all elements of concern in a given study'. This reason justifies the choice of population for this study. The population of the students of the selected university is estimated to be 40,000 as at 2016/2017 academic session. The undergraduate students were purposively selected as subject of this study since it concentrates on the youth sector of the society. Thus, the undergraduate students are a good representation of Nigerian youth.

The sample for this study comprises of 600 respondents following the guideline recommended for multivariate studies by Wimmer & Dominick (2011). The guideline they suggested is as follows: '50 = very poor; 100 = poor; 200 = fair; 300 = good; 600 = very good; 1000 = excellent'. Six faculties were randomly selected using balloting (pick without replacement) technique from the twelve faculties in the university. The data collection period ran for two weeks, during the fifth and sixth weeks of the second semester.

The faculties of Humanities, Education, Social Sciences, Law, Engineering and Basic Medical Sciences were selected to represent the university. Of the 600 students who participated, 288 (48%) were males and 312 (52%) were females ranging in the age brackets of 18 and 35. The sample was purposively drawn from six departments across the university with 92 (16%) in Linguistics and Communication Studies; 100 (18%) from Petroleum Engineering; 94 (17%) from Political and Administrative Studies; 90 (16%) in Educational Management and planning; 88 (16%) in Pharmacy and 96 (17%) from Public and Private Law. As already mentioned, the respondents were undergraduate students in different levels with 204 (36%) students in 100L; 180 (32%) in 200L; 116 (21%) in 300L and the remaining 60 (11%) were in 400L.

The instrument for data collection was questionnaire with open-ended items. The instrument of data collection (questionnaire) was administered

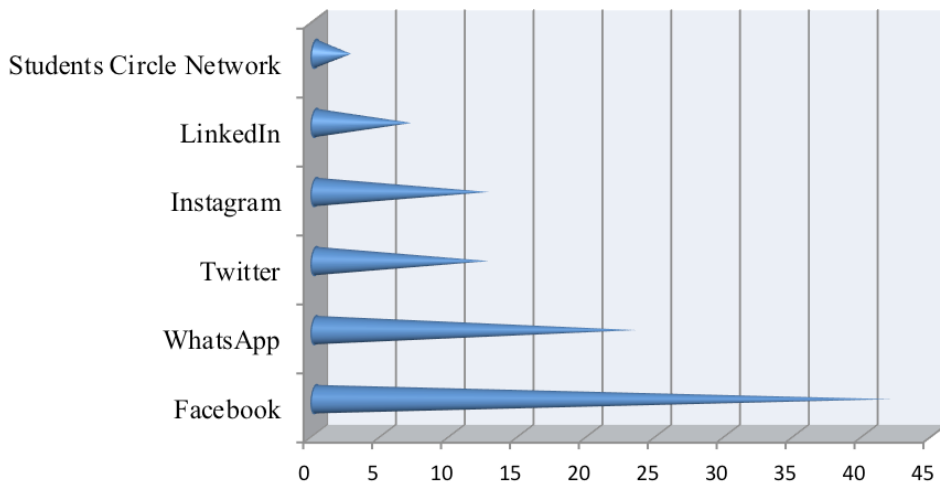
on the respondents immediately after lectures, to ascertain that the class and departments chosen were those that filled the questionnaire. In all, 600 copies of the questionnaire were distributed at random to undergraduate students physically by the researcher and two assistants. Out of 600 copies of questionnaire administered, 580 copies were retrieved which was 93% response rate while 20 copies representing 7% were either poorly filled or not returned. Some of the items in the questionnaire were adopted from Roblyer et al. (2010).

Results

RQ 1: What is the most preferred and used social networking sites by the undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt?

Figure 1

Respondents most preferred and used social networking sites



The data in *Figure 1* shows Facebook as the most preferred social networking site with 245 (41.9%) respondents, followed by WhatsApp with 135 (23.3%) respondents. Twitter and Instagram have 36 (12.6%) respondents respectively and Students Circle Network sites are the least preferred by the respondents 15 (2.6%).

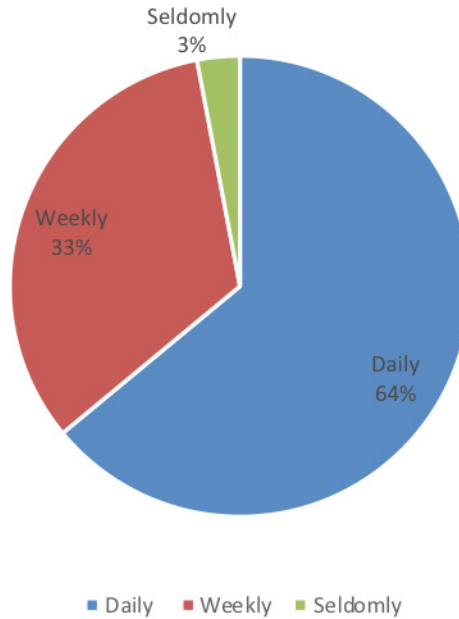
RQ 2: How often do undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt use social networking sites?

From the data collected and as shown in *Figure 2* below, 370 (64%) respondents used the social media networking sites daily, 190 (32%) used social

networking sites on a weekly basis, while only 20 (3%) used the social media networking sites once in a while.

Figure 2

Frequency of usage of the social networking sites

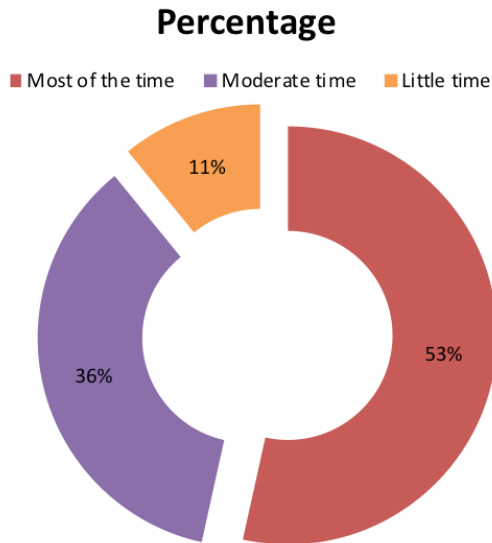


RQ 3: What is the length of time the undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt access and use the social networking sites daily?

As revealed in *Figure 3*, the majority of the respondents 53% spent most of the time of the day accessing and using the social networking sites of their choice. Of the total percentage of the respondents, 36% claimed to spend moderate time on the new media of their choice daily while 11% spent only a little time on the new media in a day.

Figure 3

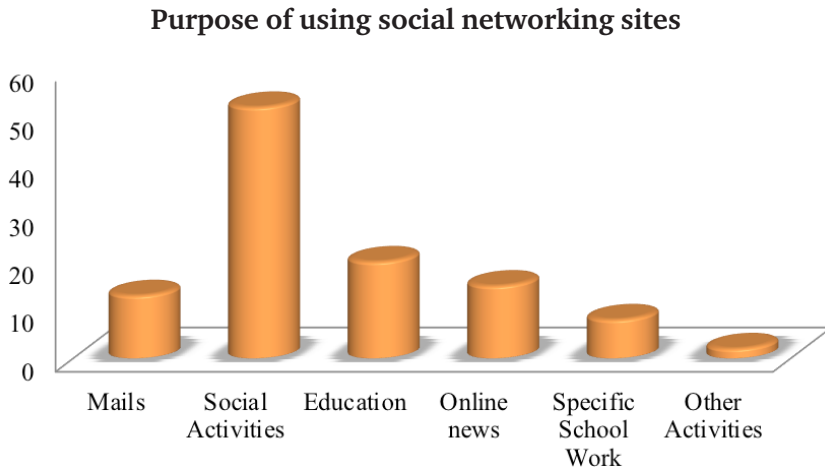
Length of time spent on social networking sites



RQ 4: For what purpose do undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt utilise social networking sites?

On the purpose for which the students use social networking sites, *Figure 4* below shows that most respondents 52% used social networking for social activities. 13% and 5% used social networking for mail and online news respectively. Also, 20% and 8% respectively used the sites for education and specific school work while only 2% used them for other purposes.

Figure 4



RQ 5: What is the effect of excessive time spent on social networking sites on the academic performances of undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt?

Figure 5

Effect of excessive time spent on socialising on academic performances

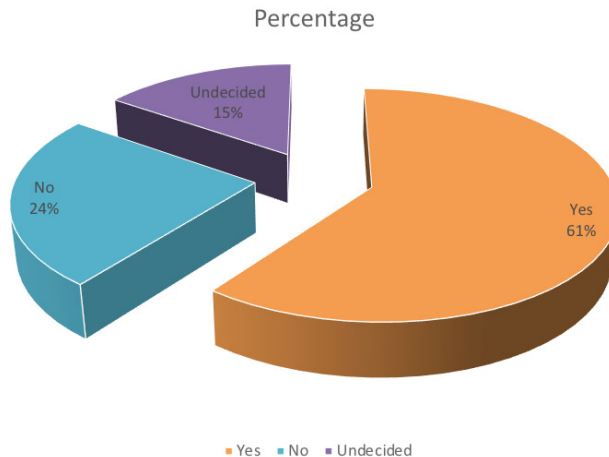


Figure 5 above shows 67% respondents that said that the length of time spent on socialisation increases the loss of concentration and poor performances of students, 27% were against this view while 6% were undecided.

Discussion of findings

On the issue of most used and preferred social networking site, the data *Figure 1* show Facebook as widely used and preferred social networking site (41.6%) by the undergraduate students of University of Port Harcourt. The results show that more students also used WhatsApp and Twitter while social networking sites like Student Circle Network are used by fewer students (2.6%). The findings confirmed the position of Flad (2010) that social media sites like Facebook and Myspace are among the most popular sites that students mostly spend their time in. About the length of time spent on the social networking sites, findings reveal that greater percentage of the students (64%) use social networking sites daily while 33% and 3% of the students use social networking site stand weekly and seldomly respectively. This implies that most undergraduate students use social networking sites frequently and spend a considerable amount of time on them but venture into many unproductive activities. This gravely affects many undergraduate students, and thus, results in poor performances in academic work.

According to the findings, higher percentage (52%) of the respondents mainly used the social networking sites for social activities. However, if we combine those respondents that used social networking sites for education in general (20%) and (8%), we get less percentage (28%) than the respondents that used social networking sites for social activities. These findings corroborate the view of Flad (2010) that students in the higher institutions of learning adopt different types of social media communication as the utmost medium to interact, keep in touch or relate to their family and friends.

In relation to the effect of the length of time spent socialising on social networking sites as against academic work, findings shows that the majority of the respondents (67%), believed that the amount of time spent on social networking sites socialising reduces their ability to concentrate on academic work and eventually leads to poor performances of undergraduate students. This finding was in consonance with the observation of Vanden-Boogart (2006) that Facebook users (social media users) have lower GPAs than average. In the same vein, Flad (2010) in a study on the effect of social media on students' academic work found that 32% out of 35% of the students that use social media have poor results in their academic work mainly because most of them did not finish their assignments and homework. These results indicate that social networking sites may be good for socialising, entertainment and academics, however, to benefit from the rich potentials of social media, students should spend less time socialising on them and utilise them more for school related activities and worthwhile events.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has been able to explore the use of social networking sites among the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt. The results and the discussion presented should be examined within the scope of the study. It primarily looked at the social networking sites that are being used and preferred, the frequency and length of time spent on them, the purpose of which they use them and the effect on the academic performances of the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt. The findings of this study showed clearly that social networking sites are being used extensively by the undergraduate students of the University of Port Harcourt. However, it is a thing of great concern that only 28% of the total respondents used social networking sites for the purpose of education or academic related activities. Thus, the more time spent on social networking sites socialising by the undergraduate students resulted into poor academic performances and may lead to low productivity.

Based on the findings of this study, it is imperative to recommend orientation programmes on the positive and creative use of the social networking sites should be organised for freshmen (new students) coming into the university. Students and youth in general should be encouraged to engage the social networking sites proactively and meritoriously to aid their academic performances. Also, as a matter of urgency, Media Literacy Education as a course should be introduced and integrated into the tertiary institutions' curricula, especially in the undergraduate programmes.

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