New Media industry's growth is in tandem altering consumers' demand

An analysis of the New Age consumers' perception of New Media

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Abstract: The media consumer today has taken up to mobile communication in a manner that has revolutionised the entire communication process, flow of information and content dissemination. The use, accessibility and ease of using technology has shrunk the devices of communication and expanded the virtual platforms of news and content dissemination and content sharing. The integration of these tools in our everyday communication patterns is two-pronged. One belief is that the availability of these communication and information sharing platforms has increased considerably and the other belief is the media consumer has become more active in the usage of them. Both the statements are facts, and hence, the growth of the New Media industry had not really been in itself, if the user hadn't accepted the changes. This paper analyses the change in the consumer activity online, the shifting base from print to online mediums, and whether new age consumers have a positive perception toward New Media usage. A survey was conducted with a sample size of 102 media consumers, chosen by a non-probability sampling procedure, representing north, south, east, west, central, and north-east geographies in India. It was found that new age consumers displayed a positive perception of New Media usage, also confirming a shift in consumer behaviour.

Key Words: Web 2.0, New Media, consumerism, digital content, communication and information sharing platforms

I. INTRODUCTION

The media consumer today has taken to mobile communication in a manner that has revolutionised the entire communication process, flow of information and content dissemination. The use, accessibility and ease of using technology has shrunk the devices of communication and expanded the virtual platforms of news and content dissemination along with content sharing. With information and communication technology and the increasing impact of social media and New Media tools, the new age media consumer is easily able to access all information.

This paper lays out a perspective on the use of New Media by the consumer, in order to reach the goal of attaining information, and in turn, provide feedback that alters the way communication is created and flows. Prior to the advent of these technologies, attaining the desired information was a humungous task as it would involve finding the right person or book that would give you detailed information of the happenings around you or the world. Visiting the library, obtaining the next day's newspapers, and getting your hands across a book that you have been searching, all required physical activity and perhaps searching geographies. Then there was the television and the radio that served as mediums for globe-trotting. And the newspapers and magazines were still in print, and were delivered to your place or the nearby library. With the advent of Web 2.0, communication has changed, drastically giving way to New Media tools like blogs, mashups, podcasts, RSS feeds, widgets and information sharing platforms like Twitter, mediums like webcasts and webinars, video sharing sites, bookmarking, use of QR codes and more.

The integration of these tools in our everyday communication patterns is two-pronged. One belief is that the availability of these communication and information sharing platforms has increased considerably and the other belief is that the media consumer has become more active in the usage of them. But in reality, it is two-way. Both the statements are facts, and hence, the growth of the New Media industry had not really been in itself, if the user hadn't accepted the changes. The availability and the acceptability have thus, gone hand in hand.

It is, in this analogy, that we understand the notion of media consumer as an influencer of flow in the media content. When there is participatory communication, and a two-way flow of information, it results in the rise of the 'prosumer'.

> …change that is brought about by ICT, it can be asserted that it is the relationship of people to media and information which has undergone the biggest transformation, specifically with the arrival of media such as Internet. Digital media allows some recipients to frequently occupy the role of senders, capable of transmitting and sharing content without renouncing the role of media consumer. This process has generated prosumer… [i]

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Katz conceptualized need gratification as something for which various media compete with each other to satisfy the media consumers' demands and needs relating to information seeking, knowledge enhancement, communication facilitation, structuring the day, relationship building, among others (Katz, et.al. 1973, p. 509). [ii] The uses and gratification model discusses how people use different forms of media for need gratification to gratify cognitive, affective, self-integrative or personal and social-integrative needs. The model is relevant in the context of the present paper with specific reference to New Media, as the current day media satisfies all types of needs – cognitive, affective, self-integrative and social-integrative. The relation between industry and the consumer is rather integrated as both are a means to an end. The analysis herein helps to understand if the industry is serving the

needs model by understanding its consumers' needs, suiting his cognitive ability and dexterity, as taken care by several content dissemination websites and portals. It also offers insight into the fact if New Media offers consumers an instant reward vis-à-vis communication.

Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel (1984) describe a communication medium's ability to reproduce information sent over it in the media richness theory. It ranks and evaluates the richness of communication media, stating how non-verbal cues cannot be evaluated on certain media like a telephone call. The theory suggests that high and low level of media richness – both have their own advantages with regards to reducing either equivocality or uncertainty. It also discusses the notion of media richness in the times of Web 2.0, owing to "rapid diffusion of social media and highly immersive virtual worlds". [iii]

The media richness theory is associated with the present study in the context that the selection and use of media, especially New Media for the desired results forms the core of computer-mediated communication in the present times. It is pertinent to understand the construct of the new age consumers and their media selection and usage. This will also lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon of blind adoption of newer forms of media, despite understanding their level of richness in making the communicator equivocal.

Pioneered in 1962 by Everett Rogers (Baran & Davis, 2012), [iv] diffusion of innovations model traces the process by which an innovative idea or practice is communicated through channels over time, among members of a social system. The model describes the factors that influence people's thoughts and actions and the process of adopting a new technology or idea. The key people in this model are the change agents, as they are well-informed about the innovations and play the role of assistance for others. They hence, lead diffusion efforts, according to Rogers (p. 282). This theory becomes highly significant for the paper, as it can help understand the concept of early adopters, change agents, digital natives, and role models vis-à-vis usage of New Media. It helps determine how the adoption of a new technology or idea, in this case, using New Media tools for various purposes, acts as diffusion at various levels for consumers.

III.   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Merging newsroom and participatory communication

A Reuters Institute Fellowship paper titled *Journalism in the Age of Social Media*, published in Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism (University of Oxford, 2010) states that web has become the new influential news-breaking tool. The paper discusses how web 2.0 and social media change the way news is gathered, reported and consumed, also has its role to play in the future of news. There is a constant emphasis on the newsroom of the future and the journalist of the future. In this, it discusses how web 2.0 has played a role in merging the newsroom and has revolutionised participatory communication, providing the reader or audiences the liberty to leave feedback in the form of 'comments' and add original content. [v]

The new media has become a more open, trustworthy and useful platform for sharing information and debating. [vi] In Spreadable Media (2013), Jenkins states 'there's a need to move focus from the broadcast era toward individual audience members, and attention has to be diverted toward the nature of participation.' [vii]

In a huge transformation, The New York Times braced a big change, meaning that the paper must transform itself at the earliest (2016, June 28). David Leonhardt, a prominent economics columnist overseeing a strategic review by a team of seven Times journalists known as the 2020 Group – an advisory committee of sorts – for executive editor Dean Baquet, said, 'The Times has changed enormously in the past few years, but it still hasn't changed enough.' Baquet warned, in a staff memo, that 'the newsroom will have to change significantly – swiftly and fearlessly. The Times further admits not adapting as quick to the media environment as it should have, where all the readers are on their phones.

In a 2011 decision, the Times started charging people to read unlimited articles on nytimes.com, and that proved to be a life-saving calculation, as it made the Times accessible to over a million digital-only subscribers to date and nearly $200 million in circulation revenue in 2015 alone. [viii]

In another move, Baquet replaced the Times' legendary Page One morning editors' meeting with 9:30 a.m. meeting to discuss how the biggest stories of the day should be covered and promoted digitally. This significant move also shows the increasing significance of going where the readers are and improvising strategies to suit the readers' needs. Pompeo also throws light on the growing influence among a cohort of younger Times journalists emerging in crucial newsroom leadership positions. These journalists are appearing strikingly confident in the digital face of the Times and are making clear how their inputs will be significant in making the publication's digital presence suitable to not the readers alone but also to the policy. But they lay emphasis on how the policy framework will have to be re-worked upon, considering the increasing demand of digital-only content and how the paper will have to change.

3.2 The shift in consumer behaviour and the question of credibility

In a survey conducted by the Columbia Journalism Review Delacorte fellows, later published as an article *New Yorker, Buzzfeed and the push for digital credibility*, authors Funt, Gourarie & Murtha (2016, June 27) [ix] revealed that 82 percent of the subjects' main news source was internet- news found online, 15 percent accessed TV, 2 percent used radio and only 1 percent attained their news and information from print. Out of the sum of participants, 31 percent found news on social media, which, according to the Pew Research Centre was the 'often' used platform, and 19 percent on search. However, nearly 70 percent of the subjects said they subscribed to at least one print magazine, and 19 percent claimed to subscribe to a newspaper. This shows an increasing

usage, fondness and ease of New Media, also due to the enhanced New Media tools. The survey also discussed credibility as an issue, and for the purpose, the researchers brought about a fictional publication along with the New Yorker and Buzzfeed, and came up with the conclusion that serious journalism, even on a new digital publication was thought to be credible if it was researched and written well.

The New Media has empowered ordinary citizens to report their political, social, community-related experiences themselves. Furthermore, the nature of Internet has made it possible for online newspapers to function with ease, as far as resources and finances are concerned, but its presence needs to be sustained (Salman et al., 2011). According to a report published in New York Times (April, 2009), the average daily circulation of newspapers declined 7% in the last and first quarters of 2008 and 2009 respectively (data- Audit Bureau of Circulations), hence showing a shift in consumer behaviour to obtaining news online. [x]

According to a data collected by this paper (Salman, et al., 2011), nytimes.com with 16 million registered users is one of the only media sources that allows customising an advertising message with specific demographic cuts, and they have been able to garner 70% premiums for their demographically targeted advertising (Gilbert, 2009). This is another example of an online entity targeting the readers and going where they are to provide the desired news and information – be it hard news or advertising.

The online space has made it convenient for the media consumer of today to access and leverage information with utmost ease. The amount of activity and communication that happens on New Media and the frequency of the use of these tools to access information is a clear indicator of the shifting focus toward online.

It also portrays the significance of the online presence for various media houses and other content providers. The movement of digital content is so rapid that it takes with it the content that flows on other traditional mass mediums. The significance of print may have reduced, but it won't fade away soon. However, it's evident that it's slowly giving way to online mediums, and media entities either shutting down or shifting base to the digital platform, for instance, the Independent going online shutting its print editions early in February this year (February, 2016). With rapid digital growth, the monthly audience of independent.co.uk has increased 33.3% to reach a mark of nearly 70 million global unique users. The article also mentions the site to be expecting to see a revenue growth of 50% this year. According to the owner, Evgeny Lebedev,

> "The newspaper industry is changing, and that change is being driven by readers. They're showing us that the future is digital. This decision preserves the Independent brand and allows us to continue to invest in the high-quality editorial content that is attracting more and more readers to our online platforms." [xi]

3.3 The emergence of the fifth estate and the phenomenon of citizen journalism

When talking of new media as the fifth estate, media convergence – by which Jenkins (2006, June 19) [xii] means 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted', is a pertinent concept to understand. This phenomenon of convergence is a result of new media turning into the fifth estate, offering a platform to the lesser known voices, and creating a two-way flow of information, and more importantly, user-generated content. The user becomes the influencer when he or she gets a voice through this medium, and that is where citizen journalism comes into play.

'Citizen journalists', according to Dr. Burns, Creative Industries faculty of Queensland University of Technology, Australia, 'act primarily as watchdog and corrective for the mainstream.' 'Today, the BBC has 23 journalists working in a UGC (user generated content) centre to process information, photos and text coming in from the general public'. CNN also has a user-generated content site iReport, where the stories, photos texts and videos are uploaded by the audience. (Alejandro, 2010, p.13-14)

A case in point to explore the phenomena of citizen journalism is the July 7, 2005 London bombings, wherein, within six hours of the incident, the BBC received over 1000 photographs, 20 amateur video clips, 4000 text messages, and 20,000 emails. Richard Sambrook, former head of global news for the BBC stated that, 'people were participating in our coverage in a way we had never seen before. By the next day, our main evening TV newscast began with a package edited entirely from video sent in by viewers.'[xiii]

This explains how audience reach is the aspect of social media that helps the organisation nest in distributing news stories. Nonetheless, using social media for news gathering and news distribution poses risks of accuracy, verification and loss of control over the information, unanimity is often found in newsrooms using social media networks for branding and making a presence in the social media sphere, driving traffic to the company's news website and breaking news.

William Dutton of the Oxford Internet Institute has termed social media as the emergence of the fifth estate. In an interview in 2009 with Nic Newman, former BBC Future Media Controller, Dutton said – we are witnessing the emergence of powerful new voices and networks which can act independently of traditional media. Highly networked individuals (helped by new platforms like social networking and messaging) can move across, undermine and go beyond the boundaries of existing institutions. [xiv]

The case of a few successful citizen journalism ventures, where online community newspaper Broowaha.com (United States), and OhmyNews (Korea) thrived, where others like Wired.com and NewsAssignment.net (Professional-Amateur models) failed, explains that independent citizen journalism's experimentation will harness the potential of the Web, in its own time.

IV.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Population and sample
A survey was conducted to collect data, to get pan-India representation – covering north, south, east, west, central, and north-east regions. A sample size of 102 media consumers – both old school and new age – was taken from the above-mentioned geography, using a non-probability sampling procedure and snowball sampling technique.

4.2. Statistical tools
To determine the category the respondents fell into – old school or new age, their usage of Print, Broadcast and New Media was determined using a 10-point scale – as part of a questionnaire – measuring their cognitive need gratification. The consumers whose needs were gratified by Print and Broadcast to a 75% extent and above were understood as to be old school consumers for the purpose of the study; and those whose 75% and above cognitive need gratification was met by New Media were understood as new age consumers.

As regards perception towards New Media usage by self, a semantic differential scale was used as part of a questionnaire.

V.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Results of descriptive statistics
Out of a sample size of 102, it was found that 52 were old school consumers as they reported an above 75% gratification of their cognitive needs through the use of Print and Broadcast, while 50 were new age consumers as they reported that their cognitive needs were gratified by New Media alone (refer figure 1). It is interesting to note here the reverse trend of New Media satisfying cognitive needs of old school consumers, and traditional media gratifying cognitive needs of new age consumers, refuting the popular belief that new age consumers can also achieve cognitive need gratification via New Media.
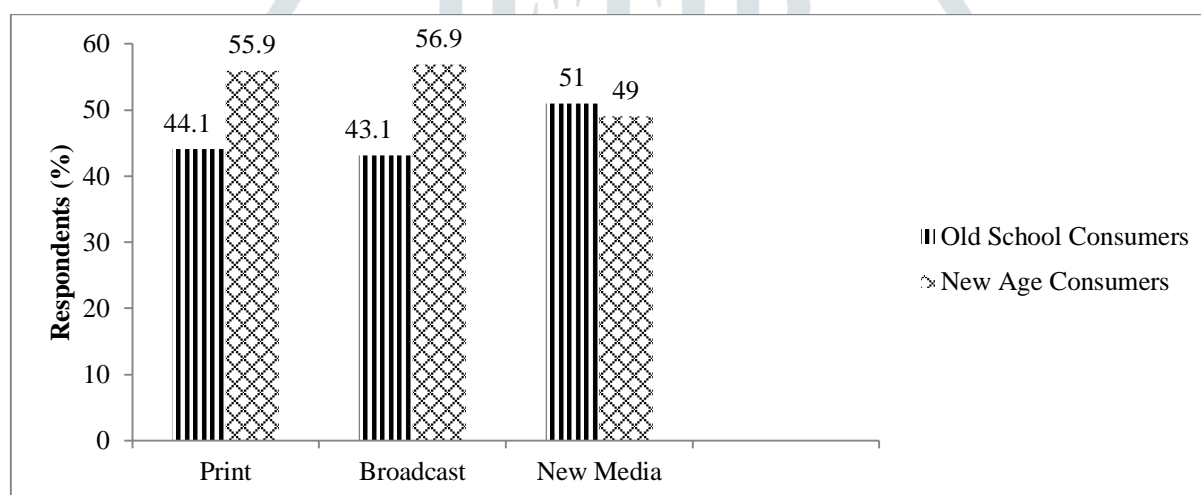

Figure 1: Differentiation between old school and new age consumers vis-à-vis cognitive need gratification through each medium

5.2. Self-perception of consumers vis-à-vis New Media usage
Understanding consumers' perception of self by determining their personal use of New Media was important to understand their pre-existing attitude of New Media usage, and the differences thus found after analysis, when it comes to need gratification. Therefore, it was important to study how significant consumers' perception is when it comes to adoption and usage of a particular medium.

H₁. New age consumers have a positive perception towards New Media usage

The hypothesis was tested using Goodman and Kruskal's gamma test. The *p-value* .014, which is less than the significance level 0.05, revealed that there is statistical significance between perception about self and New Media usage.

A semantic differential scale was created (with opposites values) to understand the extent to which consumers' perception of New Media use varied. The respondents were required to tick a relevant point on the 7-point scale, between difficult-easy; limited-unlimited; traditional-modern; casual-formal; unreliable-reliable; useless-useful; intimidating-enhancing; tense-relaxed; passive-active; and unsystematic-systematic, to determine the extent.

A detailed observation of the results revealed that out of a total of 52 old school consumers, merely 3.9% had a negative perception towards New Media, while out of a total of 50 new age consumers no one had a negative perception of usage of New Media. Results also revealed that 50% old school consumers displayed positive perception towards New Media use, as opposed to 72% new age consumers. (Refer Figure 2).
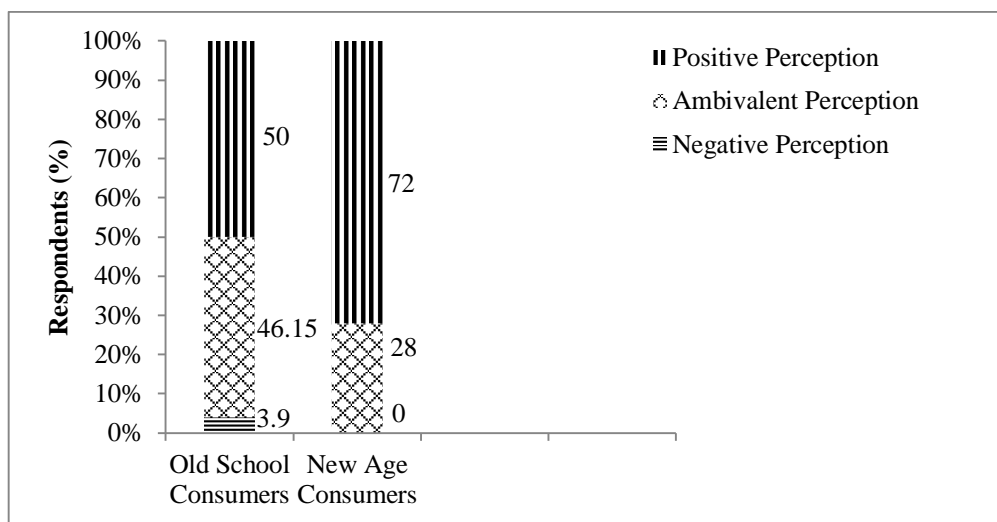
Figure 2. Media consumers' perception of personal use of New Media

Referring to figure 3, on the difficult-easy continuum, 92% new age consumers found the use of New Media to be easy in comparison to 77% old school consumers. On the limited-unlimited continuum, 86% new age consumers found the use of New Media to be unlimited in scope, and 71% old school consumers found the use of New Media to be unlimited. As regards traditional-modern continuum, 90% new age consumers think the medium to be modern, as opposed to 77% old school consumers. Marking a decline towards the trend on the casual-formal band, 26% new age consumers believe the medium to be formal. A reverse trend is shown with old school consumers' perception of the medium's casual nature, as 39% of them believe that the medium is formal. On the unreliable-reliable continuum, 64% new age consumers believe the medium to be reliable, as compared to 48% old school consumers. As far as the usefulness of the medium is concerned, measured with the useless-useful band, 80% new age consumers perceive the medium to be useful, and 75% old school consumers found the medium to be usefulness. On the intimidating-enhancing continuum, 80% new age consumers find the medium to be enhancing, in contrast with 58% old school consumers. Similarly, on the tense-relaxed band, 80% new age consumers believe that the medium is relaxing, as compared to 54% old school consumers. The trend is further strengthened with the passive-active continuum, as 88% new age consumers believing that the medium is active, as compared to 58% old school consumers. On the last continuum unsystematic-systematic, 76% new age consumers believe the medium to be systematic, as opposed to 65% old school consumers. There are stark differences on certain continuums, but the results reveal that on the whole, both new age and old school consumers display positive perception about New Media usage.
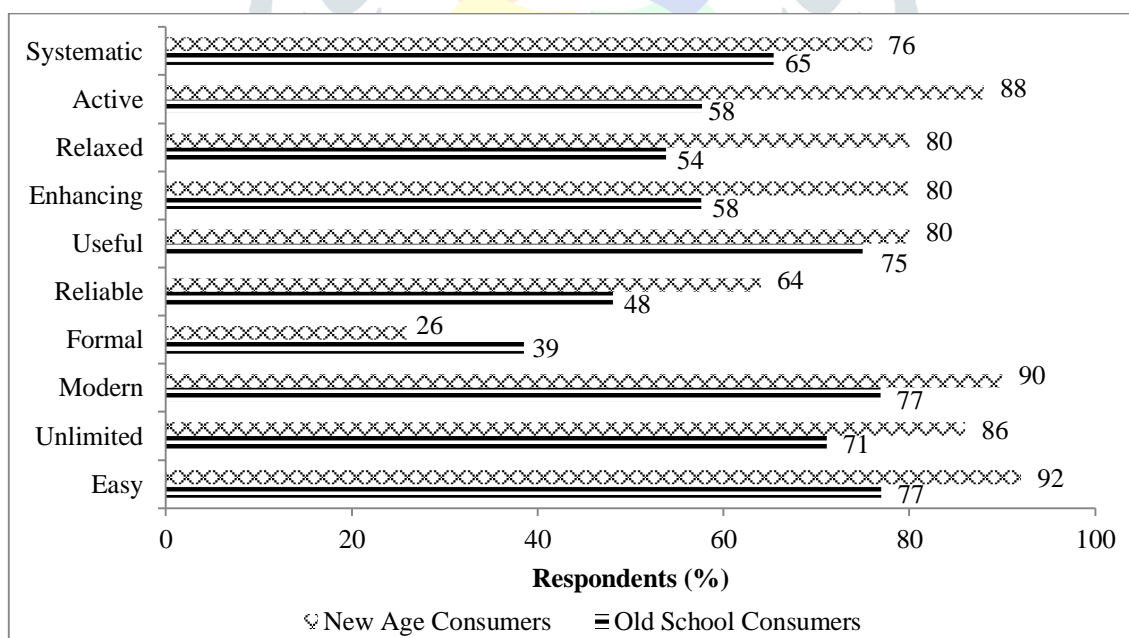

Figure 3. Media consumers' perception of personal use of New Media

The above findings are in consonance with the research study conducted by Olmstead-Chan, S. et.al, where it was found that users perceive social media on dimensions, as participation, commonality, connectedness, conversationality, and openness, implying that users find aspects of the medium to be interactive and engaging, two-way, connected, easy and open, which conform with the present study, which aims at understanding users' perception on these traits of New Media. Olmstead-Chan's research states that the characteristics of openness or ease is the strongest, which is similar to the results of the present study that states that users' perception on the trait of 'ease' is majorly positive.

VI.   CONCLUSION

The trends noted from the studies and cases, and analysis stated above, point to the consumer activity online and the shifting base from print to online mediums to obtain news and information. The media consumer has such easy access to information online and via New Media tools that reaching the consumers where they are has become an important concern for the news and information providers. The media consumer these days has no dearth of platforms and New Media tools to access these platforms, and if the news websites and other digital content won't reach them, the consumers will shift base to those that do.

It is also important to note that the media consumers don't stick to one platform or one source of news or information and their movement from one to the other source is rather quick. This also implies that the digital content providers have to cater to their interest in a manner that they find accessing their platform fruitful. Hence, New Media tools offer a plethora of means for information intake to serve the needs of the new age media consumer. To add, the new age media consumer is also producing interactive content and making use of the New Media tools to float such content online and generate discussions.

With this, the Web 2.0 opening up greater number of opportunities for the news industry and consumers alike, it also points to the lurking threat of professional crisis for journalists and media organisations. The extent of multitasking has increased manifold, as reporters are required to submit stories for a multitude of platforms – print, television, online or online versions of print publications. Therefore, there is an entirely new crop of journalists now, altering the way how the newsroom functions. The New York Times hiring its first social media editor in May 2009, and beginning the use of social media networks and publishing platforms to improve New York Times journalism is an ardent example of this new job-flow, owing to the Internet revolution.

After the realisation that it's difficult to survive in the world of user generated content, participatory communication and citizen journalism, convergence has become a norm for newsrooms. The industry is seeing a sea change of transformation and new media systems aren't only promising but complicating, as well. The current media landscape allowing the citizenry the ability to control the flow of news and information, with the help of the new media technologies has altered the way we see and deal with news, as a society. As Henry Jenkins, Director of Comparative Media Studies at MIT – also termed as Marshall McLuhan of the twenty first century – states (2006) 'convergence culture is a world where every story, every sound, every brand, image and relationship plays itself out across a number of media channels. Collective intelligence or the group as a whole can put together knowledge in a more complex way that an individual is capable of doing.'

6.1. Scope

The competition from news aggregators and the trend of networked journalism is what similar studies can further look into, as far as citizen journalism in the time of Web 2.0 is concerned.

Search engine giants like Google and Yahoo act as aggregators, collecting brief pieces of information, excerpts from articles on their homepage, much like huffingtonpost.com and thedailybeast.com, providing aggregation alongside first-hand reporting and commentary.

As for networked journalism – the process of mining public knowledge to add value to the community – the changes from being a gatekeeper to someone who delivers to a facilitator, who connects, can add value to researches to do with the concept of creating knowledge communities.

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