

# **NEW MEDIA, NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND PRINT JOURNALISM: CHANGING JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES IN THE CONVERGENT ERA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this era of technological and media convergence, the role of journalists has undergone a profound evolution. Today, cyberspace breaks the news, thereby altering the ways journalists' source and disseminate news stories. New Media and social media platforms are potential tools for journalists as well as news organizations for building identity and maintaining relations with audiences. This has resulted in most news organizations initiating their online presence to maintain their position in the competitive news market. This exerts a huge influence on the way journalists do their routine work. The extent to which journalists' have integrated the use of information and communication technologies in their professional practices, therefore, need to be ascertained. This paper is based on the technological determinism theory, which argues that the communication technology that is prevalent in any age determines the way people of that society think and believe. The digital technology has influenced journalism, evolving the working practices of media professionals. Today, the conventional print journalism converges with the contemporary New Media to enhance its news practices. This is in accordance with the media morphosis theory which states that already existing institutions unify with the changes brought by technology. The paper focuses on two aspects, changing professional practices of journalists and the development of convergent newsrooms in this digital age. Through interviews and survey conducted among journalists from the state of Assam in Northeast India, the paper tries to assess how the New Media and new communication technologies have influenced the role of journalists in the context of media convergence.

**KEYWORDS:** Digital Age, Information And Communication Technologies, Journalism, Media Convergence, New Media, Social Media.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have brought and continues to bring significant changes in the way we live. The field of

journalism is no exception. New media exerts a great influence in the present media landscape.

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New Media and new technologies exert its influence affecting and revolutionizing the day to day journalistic chores. New media has accelerated news processing in terms of timeliness, immediacy and reach (Adigwe, 2012). ICT facilitates communication and allows to process, transmit and disseminate information electronically. Journalism has gone through a number of transformation periods. Every time, a new medium brings new challenges in the working practices. Technological and media convergence have altered the news making process. The Internet is redefining journalism (Kaul) since its inception. Journalists and media houses are acquiring and adapting the changes with regard to news sourcing, packaging and conveying information. It provides a platform where journalists can connect with professionals and experts from varied disciplines and exchange knowledge. It further aids the journalists in building their own identity and helps in maintaining relationships with their audiences.

Talking about convergence in news production, the introduction of new information and communication technologies itself has brought changes in the newsroom, which in turn has affected the working environment. The technology-driven world poses lots of challenges to the journalistic profession. Journalists are no more the gatekeepers of news, thanks to social media which has taken the role of 'breaking the news.' With the advent of social media, journalistic practices have experienced a paradigm shift in every task including news sourcing to real-time sharing of information. Working journalists, in this digital age, have thus embraced the new technologies to adapt to the changing demands and working procedures (Balcytiene, Raeymaeckers, & Vartanova).

The era of online and mobile news necessitates print journalists to specialize as online journalists. They are learning new skills and training themselves to gain blogging skills, create hypertext, take and upload digital pictures as well

as add content to web pages (Okon & Eleba, 2013). Internet and New Media provides journalists the scope to research on any subject matter and collect background information. While new technologies have brought challenges and opportunities in the field of journalism, the evolution of newsroom and the development of professional practices cannot be undermined. Computers, digital camera, handheld devices, smartphones, Internet and social media challenge the traditional journalistic practices at all levels. New Media has emerged and brought positive changes to communication with respect to quality and rapidity. This has given way to the convergence of the traditional old and contemporary new media, along with a worldwide expansion of varied scope for communication. Newsrooms are continually developing so as to adapt to the latest technologies. But for ease of use, journalists need to have the required skills, competencies and possess knowledge in computer, digital and media literacy.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

This paper is based on McLuhan's technological determinism theory and Fidler's media morphosis theory. McLuhan's technological determinism theory argues that the communication technology that is prevalent in any society at a particular age determines how the people of that society think and believe. It talks about how technology influences society, mainly focussing on how journalists operate in any technological era (Nwanne, 2016). The evolution of ICT and media, technical developments are the key causes of change in a society which thereby influences the journalistic practices. Technological determinists assert that technologies like writing, print, television, and computer-all these have changed societies (Chukwu, 2014). New technologies continue to transform society in terms of individuals, institutions and social interactions. Likewise,

digital and media technology has influenced journalism, evolving the working practices of media professionals. The conventional print journalism is converging with the contemporary new media to enhance the news processes and practices. This is in accordance with the media morphosis theory which states that already existing institutions unify with the changes brought by technology. Fidler (1997), in his media morphosis theory, talks about a unified way of thinking regarding technological development of media and communication. This means that the evolution of new forms of media influence the growth and development of existing forms of media in such a way that both the media converge and in the process enhances its operations. The present study lays its foundation on both these theories, giving us an insight into how media and technological convergence has changed the journalistic practices.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The study takes into concern the following objectives:

1. To analyze the changing journalistic practices in the age of New Media
2. To understand how the newsrooms are changing in this era of media convergence

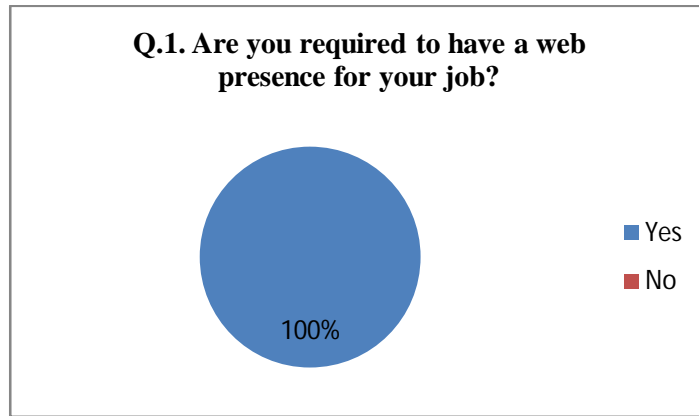
## **METHODOLOGY**

The study resorts to both qualitative and quantitative approach. Media professionals from different print media houses of the state of

Assam have been selected for conducting this research. A sample of 50 working journalists were selected through purposive sampling method and data was collected through the method of survey and in-depth interviews. The sample for the study was working journalists of some of the eminent and local print media organizations like Dainik Jugasankhya, Samayik Prasanga, Asomiya Pratidin, The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel and Eastern Chronicle. Since this study focuses on the changing professional practices of journalists and the development of convergent newsrooms in this digital age which cannot always be explained quantitatively, hence a more qualitative method has been adopted. McLuhan's technological determinism theory and media morphosis theory have been used as the theoretical framework for this study. Using a questionnaire and in-depth interview technique, the paper tries to assess how the New Media and new communication technologies have influenced the role of journalists in the context of media convergence.

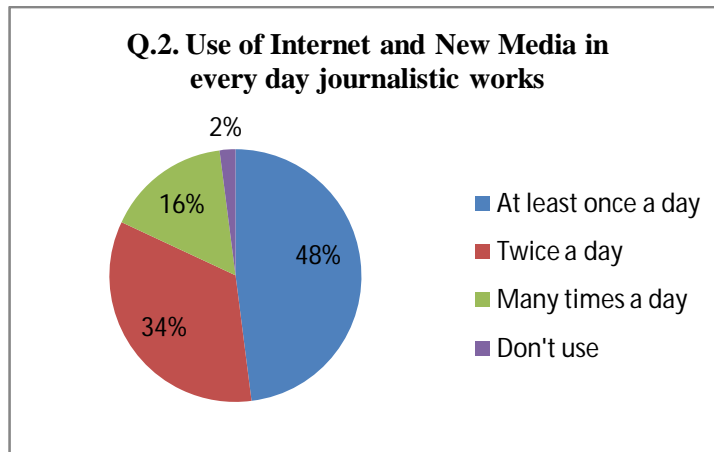
Interviews were conducted with a few journalists and news editors of various print media organizations of Assam. In order to ensure confidentiality, each of the interviewees is identified by a code (A, B, C) followed by the order in which they were transcribed (1, 2, 3). Therefore, A1 means the first coded interview, B2 represents the second coded interview and C3 designates the third coded interview. The similar trends that are derived from the interview transcripts have been discussed.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**



The above figure indicates that 100% of the sample selected for the study stated that their job requires them to have a web presence. It is

interesting to find that all the journalists surveyed for the study have a presence in the New Media.



Out of the sample of 50 respondents, 48% stated that they use the Internet and New Media at least once every day for journalistic purposes while 16% said that they use it many times per

day. This means that the Internet and New Media have become an essential part of the daily journalistic practices.

**Q.3. How much useful is the New Media in respect to the following tasks?**

Tasks	To a great extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all
Accelerating the process of gathering information	56%	32%	12%	0%
Accessing sources	36%	44%	18%	2%
Accessing local or government reports and other information	50%	34%	16%	0%
Receiving press releases	62%	26%	8%	4%
Delivering rich diverse content to audience	88%	12%	0%	0%
Investigating background information	22%	46%	32%	0%

Maximum respondents are of the opinion that New Media is useful to a great extent in accelerating the process of information gathering (56%), accessing sources (36%) as well as local or government reports and related information (50%), receiving press releases (62%) and also in

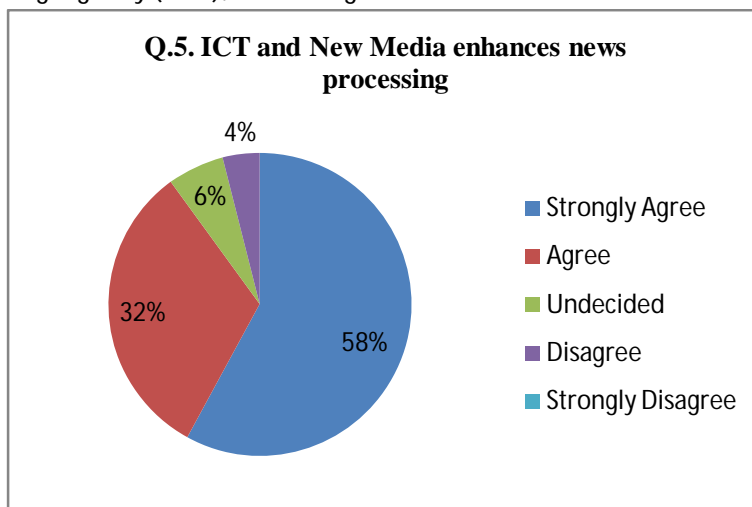
delivering rich diverse content to audience (88%). In terms of investigating background information, 46% of respondents said that New Media is somewhat useful. This reveals that all the respondents find the Internet and New Media extremely useful in every task.

**Q. 4. How much effect it would have been on the following aspects of journalistic work if you were to stop using the Internet and New Media?**

Aspect	To a great extent	Somewhat	Very little	Not at all
Tracking story topics	72%	18%	6%	4%
Getting story ideas	38%	42%	14%	6%
Finding sources	60%	36%	4%	0%
Connecting with other journalists	18%	54%	28%	0%
Keeping updated with news	8%	92%	0%	0%
Speed of information gathering	78%	22%	0%	0%
Ease of contacting newsroom while away	74%	14%	12%	0%
Real-time publishing of breaking news	94%	6%	0%	0%
Digital archives	68%	24%	8%	0%
Interaction with readers	62%	28%	2%	8%

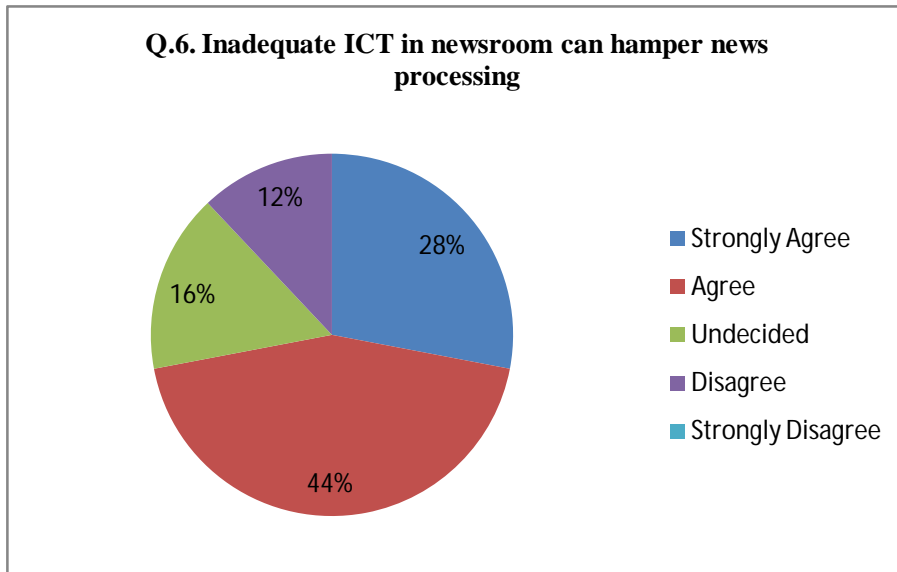
The respondents were asked that if they were to stop using the Internet and New Media, then what effect it would have on their journalistic work. Most of the respondents said that if such be the case, then their journalistic duties would be affected to a great extent in terms of real-time publishing of breaking news (94%), speed of information gathering (78%), ease of contacting newsroom while away (74%), tracking story topics (72%), archiving digitally (68%), interacting

with readers (62%) and finding sources (60%). Other aspects of journalistic work where the respondents think New Media has somewhat effected includes keeping updated with news (92%), connecting with other journalists (54%) and getting story ideas (42%). This table shows that the Internet and New Media exerts a considerable effect on all aspects of the professional duties of the respondents.



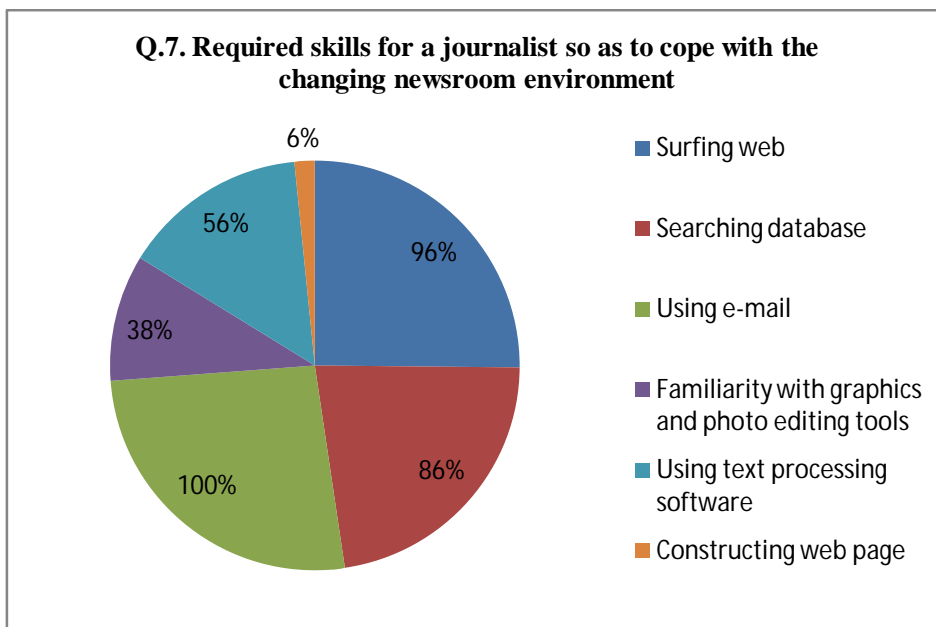
More than half of the respondents, 58% strongly agreed that ICT and New Media enhances news processing and 32% agreed to this. Only a mere 4% disagreed to the statement. This shows that

the maximum of the respondents believe that new technologies and new media have enhanced news processing.



The above figure shows that a greater percentage of respondents strongly agree (28%) and agree (44%) that inadequate ICT in the newsroom can hinder the news processing. This proves how

much the working journalists depend on the new technologies of this digital age, the unavailability of which can even hamper news processing activities. 16% of respondents were neutral.



Respondents were allowed to select multiple responses for this question which asked about the required skills for a journalist in order to cope with this changing newsroom environment. All the respondents (100%) said using e-mail is the

most essential, followed by web surfing (96%) and searching database (86%). Using text processing software (56%) and familiarity with graphics and photo editing tools (38%) are the other skills that journalists state as essential.

<b>Q.8. How difficult it was in incorporating the new technologies into your newsroom with regard to the following aspects?</b>				
<b>Aspects</b>	<b>To a great extent</b>	<b>Somewhat</b>	<b>Very little</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
Costs	8%	62%	18%	12%
Availability of technical support staff	26%	54%	14%	6%
Availability of training	34%	28%	16%	22%
Attitude of journalists	6%	22%	58%	14%
Attitude of editors/managers	14%	36%	32%	18%
Access to technology	24%	42%	28%	6%
Ease of use of technology	22%	38%	32%	8%

The respondents were asked regarding the aspects in which they faced difficulty in the process of incorporating new technologies in their newsroom.

In terms of availability of training for the journalists in using new technologies, most of the respondents (34%) faced difficulty. While in matters related to costs (62%), availability of technical staff (54%), access to technology (42%), ease of use of technology (38%) and attitude of editors/managers (36%), the respondents found it to be somewhat difficult. 58% of the respondents also said that the attitude of journalists also adds to the difficulty, though very little. The results show that in all the aspects journalists have faced at least some amount of difficulty while adapting to new technologies in their newsroom.

### **CHANGING JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES**

In this digital age, social media have become important platforms to 'break the news'. Information received now need to be distributed online first. This poses a challenge to the traditional print media, changing the reporting culture so as to process the information received and make it available to the worldwide audience instantaneously (Chadwick, 2014).

*"Social media allows me to share information with a large number of people since there are plenty of available platforms. I can directly communicate with my readers which is an added*

*benefit. Additional information and insights can also be shared easily."* (A1)

Apart from sharing the diverse content on the available online platforms, New Media is utilized in almost all aspect of journalistic chores. From gathering story ideas to contacting sources, New Media contributes in finding current and emerging stories relevant to their specialized work area. Social media proves beneficial to journalists for testing story ideas. They may cultivate news sources on the cyberspace or even pick up tips for follow-up stories. This facilitates news reporting.

*"Every day I spend a lot of time surfing the net and searching for interesting stories. The people around us have a lot to tell-their worries, concerns, success and achievements; the social media is full of such engaging and inspiring stories. We constantly get news and information on our smartphones. We, therefore have to compete with the social media for attention of the readers. We can only do that by delivering in-depth and accurate stories. Internet and social media is a great platform for finding such background information."* (B2)

Interviewee C3 provided another perspective and focussed on the importance of web presence in this age of mobile and online news. Most of the organizations now have their online presence which shows how much the print media houses have adopted the contemporary New Media. Apart from online websites, print media houses

have their social media accounts where local stories are posted every day. Journalists are required to brand their organizations in the online platforms. They can directly connect with their online audience through Facebook and Twitter and who can be the potential readers of their newspapers.

*"... In fact, my media house also supports and encourages it. This adds value to my reporting when I communicate directly with my readers online. I respond to their queries and also get feedback regarding my write-ups. This helps me in building my own journalistic identity." (C3)*

### **CHANGES IN THE NEWSROOM**

The newsroom environment is evolving to adapt to the speed, timeliness and reach of online news in this digital age. In fact, many news organizations have hired their own digital team who takes the responsibility of managing the online content. In this era of mobile and online news, it becomes a great challenge for the journalists to present the unheard information to the audience. Time management is also an essential factor now since the working procedure of the journalists have changed and they have to be expert in shooting, editing as well as writing (Chadwick, 2014) among other such duties. Most of the interviewees affirmed this.

*"We have to be a bit extra careful now with information, photographs, info-graphics and so on. Since if people find anything inaccurate, they will instantly share it in social media platforms where comment threads will continue to increase in no time. If committed mistakes, earlier it was notified to the editor through letters while now, the click of a button can spread the mistakes worldwide in seconds." (B2)*

The changes in the newsroom, therefore, have not only transformed to working procedure and work culture of the journalists but it has also altered the job opportunities in this convergent

era. Multimedia journalism has become essential in this digitally mediated age. Journalists have embraced the new technologies which is evident from the changes in their journalistic practices brought about by New Media and digital media. In this process, the newsrooms are evolving to integrate the contemporary New Media and new technologies with the conventional print media.

*"Desktop publishing and varied word processing packages are available which have enhanced the production of newspapers. A number of software are also there for electronic editing, spelling and grammar checking, proofreading and formatting, which accelerates the process of collecting and distributing news. This enhances accuracy on one hand, and controls newspaper cost on the other." (C3)*

In desktop publishing, specialized software is used through computer which combines graphics and text matter so as to create a document. That particular document can be printed on a laser print or even a typesetting machine. Electronic publishing has basically narrowed the gap existing between print media and electronic media because of technological convergence (Chukwu, 2014).

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper explores the changes in the journalistic practices brought about by New Media and technological innovations in this convergent era. Technological, media and organizational convergence (Erdal, 2007) have affected the journalistic profession and brought significant changes to the work culture. Web presence has become a necessity in this era of New Media. Drawing on data analysis, it can be said that changes have occurred as print media journalists of various news organizations of Assam incorporate the use of digital technologies and devices in their professional purposes for reaping the benefits and enhanced efficiency. From gathering information to accessing sources, New



Media exerts considerable influence in all aspects of their professional practices like contacting the newsroom while being away and interacting with their readers. In fact, print journalists are being at the forefront in the social media platforms responding to the changes in journalistic practices. The relation between journalists and their audiences have changed owing to the engagement, collaboration and sharing (Bossio, 2017) that social media provide. Survey results show that ICT and New Media have positively affected the journalistic chores, the absence and inadequacy of which may hinder efficient news processing. Findings also reveal that journalists have faced difficulties in terms of costs, proper training, availability of technical staff as well as in ease of use and access to technology. This further lead to the conclusion that while newsrooms are developing, the challenges faced by journalists in the process of adapting to new convergent technologies need to be addressed. However, despite technological changes in the newsroom environment and professional practices, the core aim of journalism continue to be what they were- cultivating authoritative news sources, generating news stories and disseminating them.

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