

ISSN 2348-5663



VOLUME 11 ISSUE 2
JULY - DECEMBER 2022

Peer Reviewed Research Journal



DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
KERALA, INDIA

COMMUNICATION &
JOURNALISM RESEARCH

VOLUME 11, ISSUE 2
JULY- DECEMBER 2022

Peer Reviewed Research Journal

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM &
MASS COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
KERALA, INDIA

Published in India by

Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut.

All rights reserved. ©2022. This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or imply or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. Publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the University or of the organizations with which they are associated.

Editorial Team

Advisory Board

Prof. Syed Amjed Ahmed, Former Director, EMMRC, University of Calicut

Prof. Usha Rani, Professor of Journalism, University of Mysore, Karnataka

Prof. Subash Kuttan, Former Head, Department of Journalism, University of Kerala

Dr. Sucheta Nair, Former Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

Chief Editor

Head, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

Editors

Dr. Lakshmi Pradeep, University of Calicut

Dr. Muhammadali N, University of Calicut

Dr. K. A. Nuaiman, University of Calicut

Dr. Anupama KP, University of Calicut

Raju C.V., University of Calicut

Guest Editor

Dr. Sanjeev S.R.

Mar Ivanios College (Autonomous), Thiruvananthapuram

Editorial Assistants

Sajeed Naduthody

Sikha N

Vidhu Mary John

Sajna M. K.

Ramis Salam P

Gayathri Baiju

S. Gayathri

Manjusha P M

Habeeb Rahman Y P

Navaneeth T M

Address for Communication

The Chief Editor, Communication and Journalism Research

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

University of Calicut - 673635

Kerala, India.

Email: masscomhod@uoc.ac.in

Information for Contributors

Communication and Journalism Research is a biannual peer reviewed journal that publishes significant original research works and reviews in communication and journalism. We welcome original research articles, reviews, theoretical papers, and case studies that contribute to the field.

All manuscripts should be written in English and follow the APA (American Psychological Association) style. Use 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced lines, and 1-inch margins on all sides. Number all pages consecutively, starting from the title page. Title Page must include the title of the paper, author names and affiliations, and corresponding author's contact information. Provide a concise summary (150-250 words) of the main objectives, methods, results, and conclusions of the study. Include 4-6 keywords that accurately represent the content of the manuscript. List all cited references following the APA style guidelines. Research Articles and Literature Reviews: 3000 to 5,000 words (excluding abstract, references, and appendices). Theoretical Papers and Case Studies: 2500 to 4,000 words (excluding abstract, references, and appendices).

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically on masscomhod@uoc.ac.in. Prepare your manuscript in a standard document format (e.g., Microsoft Word) and ensure it is free from any identifying author information to ensure blind review. Include a cover letter with your submission, briefly outlining the significance of the research and confirming that the manuscript is not under consideration by any other journal.

All manuscripts undergo a rigorous double-blind peer review process by experts in the field. The review process aims to provide constructive feedback and ensure the quality and integrity of published work. All submissions should be original work that has not been previously published or submitted elsewhere. Plagiarism in any form is strictly prohibited and may result in immediate rejection or retraction of published articles. Authors are responsible for ensuring that their research complies with ethical standards and guidelines. Any potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed in the manuscript.

Contents

Free Media and Rights of Citizens with Special Reference to Online Free Speech and Indian Laws	1-11
Swapna George	
Belittled Cultural Representation: Critiquing Disability Discourses in Malayalam Cinema	13-26
Miby Miriam Jacob & Ciby K Varghese	
An Analysis of Data Journalism Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities	27-40
Navaneeth T M & Muhammadali Nellyullathil	
Role of Social Media in Political Participation among Students	41-52
Ansu Joseph & Lakshmi Pradeep	
An Analysis of Posts by Kerala Police on their Facebook Page	53-61
Silpa Mathew	

Editor's Note

This issue of CJR presents a variety of issues which are under discussion in the fields of media and communication. The lack of comprehensive legal framework which governs IT and internet enabled media has always been a much debated topic. Governmental initiatives to bring in new legislations have always lead to heated exchanges between stakeholders. Concerns were raised about the new legislative provisions' detrimental effect on the freedom of speech and expression enshrined in the constitution of India. Swapna George explores this aspect in detail in her exploratory study presented in this issue.

When the constitutional morality of new legislations is being questioned, the artistic morality and ethics also needs a relook and review. Miby Jacob flags an important issue of 'othering' of differently abled in popular cultural products, particularly Malayalam Cinema. This study may compel us to have an empathetic outlook on our artistic expressions meant for popular media.

Navaneeth has attempted to identify the pedagogical gaps in emerging fields of mass communication. He concluded that in order to learn and teach data journalism, the class room system should undergo radical changes to incorporate more hands-on training and industry linkage. Processing of data without human touch may end up with catastrophic effects. While mastering AI and ML tools to engage with data, one should also be mindful of the human realities and sensitivities. This aspect can be taught only by experienced teachers.

Ansu Joseph's study explored the role of social media in influencing political participation and efficacy among young population. While recognising the potential of social media to train students in democratic process, the researchers acknowledge it as an unfinished project. Karthika C.K.'s study reveals the role of social media influencers' role in purchase decisions and behavioural changes of the consumers.

Silpa Mathew enquired how a policing system can effectively use social media to communicate with public at large. By curating posts with popular culture motifs, the police of Kerala could build a friendly relationship with common people and thereby make the policing accessible to them.

Free Media and Rights of Citizens with Special Reference to Online Free Speech and Indian Laws

Communication & Journalism Research
11 (2) pp 1-11
©The Author (s) 2022
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Swapna George*

Research Scholar, Govt. Law College Ernakulam, M.G. University, Kerala

Abstract

In these present days, when information technology and electronic communication are fast changing the style and nature of social life, it is a legal priority to have an overview and analysis of existing provisions that guarantee the right to freedom of media people including newborn social media, and reasonable restrictions on that ring in the interest of individual rights and public interest. It is more so because media as such do not enjoy any exclusive right to expression in contrast with the rights of an ordinary citizen of India. Media have their share of right to freedom of speech and expression quite the same way and in an equal degree as the Constitution of India confers on its common citizen.

One of the first legislative measures in the field for regulating and governing the electronic world of the internet was brought by way of enactment of the Information Technology Act 2000. The Act recognized the legal status of electronic records for various purposes. It also provides for the penalization and punishment of several cyber crimes. Now the government of India has come up with a set of rules called The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 in the exercise of their power conferred by sub-section (1), clauses (z) and (zg) of the sub-section (2) of Section 87 of the Information Technology Act 2000. It covers Social Media and OTT (Over The Top) Platforms under its provisions of regulations. This paper examines the state of online free speech and Indian Laws.

Keywords

Online Free Speech, Media Freedom, Social Media, Information Technology Act, Intermediary Rules

Introduction

In these present days, when information technology and electronic communication are fast changing the style and nature of social life, it is a priority to have an overview and analysis of existing provisions that guarantee the right to freedom of media people including newborn social media, and reasonable restrictions on that ring in the interest of individual rights and public interest. It is more so because media as such do not enjoy any exclusive right to expression in contrast with the rights of an ordinary citizen of India. Media have their share of right to freedom of speech and expression quite the same way and in an equal degree as the Constitution of India confers on its common citizen. Similarly considering the potential of the media to have a negative social impact on the lives of the people due to the influential publication of information, it is a highly required necessity that media

* Correspondence: Email: sapna304@gmail.com

operations are checked and balanced in the best interest of society. We need a balanced scale of claims of media and citizens with a potential of tilting in favour of individual rights in the event of any disturbance to the said equilibrium.

Free speech and democracy

The preamble of the Constitution of India declares India to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. The right to freedom of expression, which is one of the basic human rights, is a fundamental feature of a democratic society. In a democratic country where people are governed by representatives elected by them themselves from within, the liberty to speak their minds holds high. Freedom of expression is known as the fourth pillar of the governmental framework. According to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ‘*everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinion without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.*’ Democratic values of a society without assurance of a fearless atmosphere for free speech would be nothing but hollow words. The democratic system attaches great importance to the right to free speech. In *Romesh Thapper v. State of Madras*², Patanjali Sastri CJ observed “*Freedom of speech and of the press lay at the foundation of all democratic organizations, for without free political discussion no public education, so essential for the proper functioning of the process of popular government, is possible*”.

Freedom of speech and expression under the Indian Constitution

Expression of opinion, thoughts, emotions, ideas, feelings and the like is quite human and natural; on the other side, its suppression is unnatural and anti-human. Gaining and sharing knowledge and information among people is one of the pivotal elementary factors in forming a society. In tune with the growth of international law in terms of human rights jurisprudence and the basic right of speech and expression, many nations have given constitutional recognition and protection.

Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India guarantees its citizens the right to freedom of speech and expression. Of the six freedoms conferred under the provisions of Article 19 right to freedom of speech and expression is the most valuable one. It is to be read as part and parcel of the right to life enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution.

² AIR 1950 SC 124

Media functions as the constructive pillar of the society

The word 'media' has been derived from the Latin word *midus* (meaning middle). Accordingly, the term conveys the idea of being means of communication. Evolved over time, now the term Media stands for several connotations including press, the media people, any established media firm, media house, and types of media classified as print media, television media, and newborn social media. All of it represents the collection, storage, and circulation of various data ranging from news, views, entertainment, opinion, arguments, etc. Now it has grown to such a level of organized institutions in the social gathering and spreading of information among the people that it is christened as the fourth pillar of the society after legislature, executive, and the judiciary, though still conferred as a popular status only with no legal recognition.

Right of media for speech and expression

Unlike the Constitution of the US, the Constitution of India does not expressly mention liberty or freedom of expression of the press or media. But is a settled legal position that the right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1) (a) also includes the right of press media as well³. It is relevant to note that the wordings used are 'freedom of speech and expression' and not 'speech and expression'. The terminology of freedom of speech and expression is a composite one. Similarly, both these expressions are different in their meaning and scope. Freedom of speech and expression denotes liberty to express one's views, opinions, and beliefs. It means the right to express one's convictions and opinions freely by word of mouth, writing, printing, pictures, or any other mode.

Age of social media

As a result of the explosive growth of information technology society is currently living in the age of social media. In contrast with the traditional concept of media covering print and television media, the term social media conveys the idea of a group of internet-based interactive platforms. The emergence and growth of social media are linked to one of the human ideas of getting connected to others around. At the same time when the exponential growth of social media has brought the world to a global village, its misuse by anti-social elements also poses a great number of threats to order, safety, and security in society.

³ *Sakal Papers (P) Ltd v Union of India*, AIR 1962 SC 305

Regulations and their purposes

One of the first legislative measures in the field for regulating and governing the electronic world of the internet was brought by way of enactment of the Information Technology Act 2000. The Act recognized the legal status of electronic records for various purposes. It also provides for the penalization and punishment of several cyber-crimes. Chapter XI of the Act consisting of Sections 65 to 78 deals with different kinds of cyber-crimes namely tampering with computer source documents, sending offensive messages, receiving stolen computer resources, violation of privacy, cyber terrorism, and obscenity.

Freedom of Speech and Restrictions

The aforesaid right to freedom of speech and expression as provided under Article 19(1) (a) is not an absolute right but is subject to restrictions under the Constitution and Penal laws. Articles 19(2) to 19 (6) of the Constitution lays reasonable restrictions on the fundamental freedoms guaranteed under Article. Out of this Article, 19(2) stipulates eight grounds based on which reasonable restrictions are imposed on the right to freedom of speech and expression. The right to free expression is one of the most important fundamental rights, restrictions imposed have to pass the test of reasonableness. In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*,⁴ it was held by the Hon'ble Supreme Court that “*any law seeking to impose a restriction on the freedom of speech can only pass muster if it is proximately related to any of the eight subject matters set out in Article 19(2)*”. In this case, the court struck down Section 66A of the Information Technology Act⁵ as unconstitutional because the regulation of electronic communication under the said provision was not any of the eight grounds for imposing reasonable restrictions as aforementioned. Section 66A provided for

⁴ (2015) 5 SCC1

⁵ **Sec.66A. Punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service, etc.**--Any person who sends, by means of a computer resource or a communication device,

- (a) any information that is grossly offensive or has menacing character; or
- (b) any information which he knows to be false, but for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience, danger, obstruction, insult, injury, criminal intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will, persistently by making use of such computer resource or a communication device;
- (c) any electronic mail or electronic mail message for the purpose of causing annoyance or inconvenience or to deceive or to mislead the addressee or recipient about the origin of such messages,

shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and with fine

severe punishment for sending electronic messages causing annoyance and inconvenience.

Constitutional Grounds for Reasonable Restrictions⁶

i. Sovereignty and Integrity of India: - This ground was added by the 16th Constitutional Amendment in the year 1963 for guarding against the freedom of speech and expression from being used to attack the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Union.

ii. Security of the State: - All utterances intended for overthrowing the government, waging war making rebellion against the government, external aggression, etc. Not every public disorder but only those serious and aggravated forms of the public disorder are within the expression of “security of the state”.

iii. Friendly relations with foreign states:-The state got the power to impose restrictions in the interest of friendly relations with foreign states by way of the Constitutional First Amendment in 1951.

iv. Public Order: - This ground was added by the First Constitutional Amendment as necessitated by the refusal of the Supreme Court to permit the imposition of restrictions on the right to speech in the interest of public order in the Romesh Thapper case.

v. Decency and Morality: - In this ground decency is the same as lack of obscenity. Obscenity comes as a ground of reasonable restriction in the Constitution since it represents the clash between the individual right to free speech and expression on the one side and the duty of the state to safeguard the morals of the society.

vi. Contempt of Court:-In *Leo Roy Frey v. R Prasad*⁷, it was held that *the Constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression does not prevent courts from punishing for their contempt spoken, words printed, or any other expressions having the effect of contempt of court*. Now contempt is defined under the provisions of the Contempt of Courts Act 1971.

vii. Defamation: - Defamation is a ground for restriction because defamatory matter exposes one to hatred, ridicule, or contempt. In *Subramanian Swamy v Union of India*,⁸ it was held *that every person is entitled to dignity and*

⁶ Article 19(2)-(6), Constitution of India

⁷ AIR 1958 Punj 377

⁸ (2016) 7 SCC 221,344

reputation and nobody has a right to denigrate others' right to dignity or reputation.

viii. Incitement to an offence: - The freedom of speech and expression cannot be allowed to go to the level of inciting or abetting offences. In the *State of Bihar v. Shailabala Devi*,⁹ it was held by the Supreme Court that *incitement to murder or other violent crimes would generally endanger the security of the State.*

Restrictions under the Indian Penal Code

Based on the grounds provided for in the Constitution, the state can impose reasonable restrictions on the rights of the citizen to speak and express themselves. Such restrictions can give birth to the definition of crimes and imposition of criminal liability. Some of them have been provided for under the general penal law of India.

i. Section 124A Sedition: - The act of sedition has not been included as a ground in the Constitution. This word has a varying connotations. Bringing hatred, contempt, or disaffection in the people against the government by words, signs, or visible representation or otherwise is punishable with imprisonment or life imprisonment.

ii. Section 153A:- This section punishes causing enmity, disharmony, and ill-will between different religious, racial, language, or regional groups, communities, or castes by words, signs, visible representations, or otherwise.

iii. Defamation – Section 499:- Defamation of a person by imputation is punishable under this provision. Defamation as such is a ground for reasonable restrictions as covered under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

Free Media and Rights of State and Citizens

Freedom of communication is a vital factor for the existence of a successful democratic society. In a sense, the right to freedom of speech and expression can be said to be the cornerstone of democracy. Though the institutional media have not been given any separate treatment in terms of free speech their rights are covered under the Constitution on the same line as those of the citizenry. Consequently, all the rights to free speech and expression enjoyed by the citizen of India can be claimed and enjoyed by the Media Organizations as well.

⁹ AIR 1952 SC 329

Though the media can play a constructive and positive role in the field of protection of human rights at times the role of media and their freedom of expression is misused causing many violations of valuable human rights. Unscrupulous and irresponsible media may also cause threats to social harmony and national security.

i. Violation of Individual Privacy: - One of the areas of infringement of individual rights committed by media persons is the most valued right to privacy of citizens. Their privacy is violated by the media in the name of investigative journalism. Uncontrolled publication of individual data in connection with unpleasant events and incidents without consent or authenticity causes irreparable damage to the goodwill and reputation of the people. In *K. S. Puttaswamy's* case,¹⁰ it has been held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right comprised within the provisions of Article 21 of the Constitution. Fundamental rights are guaranteed vertically against the excess of governmental power, but now they are held to be protected horizontally also against their violation by other private persons including the media.

ii. Media Trial:- Nowadays activism of media leads to media trials of cases, mainly criminal cases, with created sensation, trampling upon cherished rights and interests of the people, both victims and the accused, causing them anguish and trauma. Unwarranted publication of unverified content without caution and care destroys the credibility of the people leaving marks of social stigma in their lives.

Limiting restrictions on media

The theory that fundamental rights are not absolute applies squarely to media too. Not just that given the potential of media to sow severe damage in the personal life of the people by way of their privacy violations and media trials it is the need of the hour to put some additional measures restrictions. The media has to be held responsible and accountable for the publication of their news, views, and reports. There are several legislations dealing with the functioning of the media like the Press and Regulation of Books Act 1867, Press Council of India Act 1956, etc.

Social Media Regulation – Challenges

Unlike other media, social media poses its kinds of challenges as well as opportunities before society. Whereas other usual media has a place of business and an institution or organization with the responsible and traceable human agency at its helm the newly emerged social media runs through social

¹⁰ *Justice K.S.Puttaswamy(Retd) v. Union Of India*, (2017) 10 SCC 1

networks with online operations. Social media sheds the cover of anonymity for those who like to operate from the darkness. Moreover, it knows no geographical boundaries as the network covers various nations. As of now international cooperation and law-making are in the budding stage only. Not only that it is also difficult to have uniform principles or rules as the standards of morality and criminality are different among countries, especially in terms of the right to speech and expression.

Intermediary Rules and impact on democracy

Now the Government of India has come up with a set of Rules called The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 in the exercise of their power conferred by sub-section (1), clauses (z) and (zg) of the sub-section (2) of Section 87 of the Information Technology Act 2000¹¹.

It covers Social Media and OTT (Over the Top) Platforms under its provisions of regulations. An intermediary which primarily or solely enables online interaction between two or more users and allows them to create, upload, share, disseminate, modify or access information using its services is called a social media intermediary. And such an intermediary having fifty lakh registered users is called a significant social media intermediary.

This Rule stipulates that social media intermediaries have to observe due diligence as provided for in it. As per the provisions of Rule 7, the intermediary failing to observe these rules will be deprived of immunity which could otherwise be enjoyed under Section 79 of the Act. An intermediary enjoying the said immunity will not be held liable for postings of content made by its users. Consequently, non-compliance with the rules makes the intermediary liable for the content of posts created and uploaded by its users. Among others these rules include:-

- *Publication of rules and regulations, privacy policy and user agreement, and user agreement for access or usage of its computer resource by any person*
- *Inform the user of its computer resource not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any information that belongs to another person, or is defamatory, obscene, pornographic, invasive of another's privacy, including bodily privacy, insulting or harassing based on gender, libelous, racially or ethnically objectionable, or which is harmful to the child or threatens the unity,*

¹¹ Sec.87- Power of Central Government to make rules.

integrity, defense, security or sovereignty of India, friendly relations with foreign states, or public order, or causes incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence.

- *Take all reasonable measures to secure its reasonable security practices and procedures as prescribed in the Rules*

Likewise, the Rules also state that significant social media intermediaries are bound to observe additional due diligence, including the Chief Compliance Officer's appointment to ensure compliance with the Act and Rules.

These rules are said to be enacted for the protection of social and national interests. It aims to prevent irresponsible anti-social publications and fix accountability for those misusing social media platforms. It is made to uproot cyberspace misdemeanors and offensive acts and regulate the operation of the OTT platforms as well.

Even when these rules are defended in the name of protecting the rights of individuals and public rights and the unity and integrity of the nation the same has to be tested against the touchstone of the reasonableness of the restrictions as stipulated under the provisions of Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

The state must protect and preserve the individual as well as the media's right to freedom of speech and expression of its people. At the same time, it has to safeguard social interests and individual privacy. It has to maintain a judicious balance between media rights and individual interests.

Censorship by Government through the amendment to the Intermediary Rules

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology lately proposed an amendment to the IT Rules 2021 that would further harden the Internet censorship. This has caused profound unease among those who value free speech and media freedom in India with the advent of The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

There will be a new grouping to take down social media content and news media content with respect to the amendment. The proposed amendment to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 which states that online intermediaries must take down any information identified as "false" or "misleading" by the government agency, press information bureau (PIB) or "other agency authorized by the

central government”¹². Ironically, the PIB lacks regulatory or oversight powers and hence it cannot exercise supreme power over what independent media publishes in the name of ‘fact-checks’. As a matter of fact, the Press Information Bureau (PIB) is the nodal agency of the Government of India to disseminate information to the print and electronic media on government policies, programmes, initiatives and achievements¹³.

These Rules give executives the excessive authority to bring all online news under its ambit through the imposition of a nebulous ‘Code of Ethics’ on online news media accompanying the three-tier Grievance Redressal Committees, the final tier of which is adjudicated by government nominees. The constitution of the three Grievance Appellate Committees (GAC)¹⁴ and them being chaired by government functionaries under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Ministry of Electronics and IT, respectively is what affects online free speech the most¹⁵.

Conclusion

As public views have increasingly shifted online, governments around the world are tussling to control the online sphere. For that matter, the union government has tried to enforce control over online platform over the last few years. Certain initiatives taken by the government are benign and aim at establishing accountability for digital platforms. But, the interventions being made by the Government of India is against free speech guaranteed by constitution in many spectrums. There have been amendments to IT rules, giving the executive the supreme authority to control what can be said online. It will seriously affect the operations of not just social media intermediaries but also all providers of digital news content, if the amendment is implemented. Then, it would definitely violate press freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Art. 19 (1) (a) of the constitution of India.

In conclusion, on the one side, for the successful existence of a democratic society, strong built media culture and circumstances for their functioning

¹² Amendment to Rule 3(1)(b)(v)

¹³ https://pib.gov.in/Content/205_5_AboutPIB.aspx (last accessed 7th March 2023, 7pm)

¹⁴ Rule 3A, The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021

¹⁵ Rule 3A. Appeal to Grievance Appellate Committee(s).—(1) The Central Government shall, by notification, establish one or more Grievance Appellate Committees within three months from the date of commencement of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2022.

(2) Each Grievance Appellate Committee shall consist of a chairperson and two whole time members appointed by the Central Government, of which one shall be a member ex-officio and two shall be independent members

without fear or pressure, especially from the governmental machinery, and on the other side there should be protection and assurance of fructuous enjoyment of individual rights especially right to privacy and dignity. The success of democracy depends on the existence of free media and its fulfillment hinges on protecting and upholding the valuable human and fundamental rights of its people.

References:

H.M.Seervai (1991), *Constitutional Law of India*, Sweet & Maxwell

D.D. Basu, *Law of the Press* (5th Edn.) (2010), LexisNexis, Butterworths Wadhwa

P.M.Baskhi (1985), *Press Law: An Introduction*, BTRFI Publications

Thomas Gibbons (1998), *Regulating the Media*, 2nd Edn., Sweet & Maxwell

Timothy Garton Ash (2006), *Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World*. Atlantic Books

Aparamita Basu (n.d), *Media Laws- An Overview*, Legal Services India
<https://www.legalserviceindia.com/articles/media.htm>

Tanu Priya (2015), *Freedom Of Speech And Expression*.
<https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/freedom-of-speech-and-expression/>

[The Information Technology \(Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code\) Rules, 2021, https://prindia.org/billtrack/the-information-technology-intermediary-guidelines-and-digital-media-ethics-code-rules-2021](https://prindia.org/billtrack/the-information-technology-intermediary-guidelines-and-digital-media-ethics-code-rules-2021)

[Aashish Aryan, Explained: Social media and safe harbor, 2021, https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/intermediary-guidelines-digital-media-ethics-code-facebook-twitter-instagram-7331820/](https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/intermediary-guidelines-digital-media-ethics-code-facebook-twitter-instagram-7331820/)

Government notifies Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021, <https://vikaspedia.in/news/government-notifies-information-technology-intermediary-guidelines-and-digital-media-ethics-code-rules-2021>

<https://www.meity.gov.in/content/draft-amendments-it-intermediary-guidelines-and-digital-media-ethics-code-rules-2021>

I.Prateek Singh, *Cyber Law In India, IT Act, 2000*,
<https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-836-cyber-law-in-india-it-act-2000.html>

https://pib.gov.in/Content/205_5_AboutPIB.aspx

Belittled Cultural Representation: Critiquing Disability Discourses in Malayalam Cinema

Communication & Journalism Research
11 (2) pp 13-26
©The Author (s) 2022
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Miby Miriam Jacob *

Research Scholar, Department of English, All Saints' College, Trivandrum

Ciby K Varghese

Film Student, New Wave Film School, Kozhikode

Abstract

The concept of normalcy presented in popular media and mainstream culture is complex, causing marginalised sections to be subjugated further. Indian cinema has always conformed to the conventional norms that glorify non-disabled, heterosexual, masculine bodies where minority communities are treated as 'the other'. Ableism is still prevalent in movies, where they continue to create a hierarchy of disability stigma, negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in multiple ways. Malayalam films, while trying to foreground aesthetic, traditional and moral values, knowingly or unknowingly become tools that promote the 'ideal' utopian world where there are no impaired bodies/minds. Over the course of time, the invisibility of disability in movies gave way to mocking, objectifying and commodifying persons with disabilities. Even those that come out with the label 'disability films' sometimes seem to be doing very little justice to themselves. The depiction of disability in an infantilised as well as an institutionalised manner occurs as a result of the harmful misconception that it is associated with illness, pity and dependency. Portraying disability as the ultimate punishment for one's ancestors' sins and using the particular idea to indicate evil omens is a trend even in contemporary narrative film. Desexualising disabled bodies diverts attention from individuals to physical structures and misleads the non-disabled audience to believe that disabled people lack sexual desires. Supporting characters who are disabled mostly turn out to be over-dramatising and end up being comic elements. The reluctance of the entertainment industry to cast disabled performers in disabled roles is another example of how ableism works. The paper does not limit its focus to a particular text alone but identifies a couple of Malayalam film narratives post 1990s, from the perspectives of a disability studies researcher and a film student. This study is also an attempt to destigmatise disability by rejecting the politically-incorrect notions that have been normalised over decades. Although the term constitutes a single category, disability as a cultural theme is diverse, with a plurality of different individual groups through which disabled people embrace and celebrate their identities. Considering how cinema impacts national consciousness, contributes to public opinion and influences their socio-political understanding, it is very significant to talk about and question the wrong ways in which sensitive topics like disability are placed on screen.

Keywords

Disability, Malayalam cinema, Visual Media, Cinematic language, Representation

* Correspondence: Email: mibyjacob22@gmail.com

Introduction

An average person's perception about various things largely depends on how each incident and individual is portrayed in art and literature. Powerful representations that reflect contemporary sociocultural issues are capable of exerting an impact on public opinion as well as the national consciousness. Popular cinema, being one of the most effective means that can influence the thinking of the general public, not only entertains its audience, but also enlightens them and brings in social changes. But a society that is conditioned by existing taboos and prejudices takes time to unlearn them and accept changes, especially when it comes to minority problems. In the attempt to shed light on the new phenomena in art and literary forms, the dilemmas of minority communities are often disregarded because they are not 'marketable' in the corporate sector. Whenever they are visible on screen, they are depicted in the most stereotypical manner possible. In a multicultural nation like India where patriarchy and ableism prevail, film narratives are still reluctant about getting the representation right. Such false portrayals, to some extent, have also contributed to the formation of certain expectations the mainstream society keeps about gender roles, body images, skin colour, the efficacy of human mind and the standard of living.

Disability, a topic that has not been given the importance it deserves, is still bound by stigma and negative stereotypes in the non-disabled culture. The general understanding of disability is that it refers to any malfunction associated with one's body or mind. Instead, disability is a social construct like gender or sexuality, and is a definition given to indicate the multiple barriers inflicted on them by society. Contrary to this, impairment is the term that describes the differences in one's physical structure or mental functioning. In short, a disabled person or a person with disability (PwD) is someone with a diverse bodily experience, for whom resources are inaccessible due to systemic barriers.

Cinematic language is the method and conventions of filmmaking that are used to communicate with the audience. Visual storytelling is only one part of cinematic language. Emotions and ideas are expressed primarily with cinematography and they are aided with different types of techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, colour and lighting, editing, use of dialogue and narrative (timings of scenes and importance of placement in the narrative timeline), cinematography angle choices and sound. It is useful to consider the conventions of literature that are used to convey meaning and communicate with the reader when we try to understand cinematic language. Literature often

uses literary techniques such as symbolism or narration to portray meaning and communicate plot, characterisation or themes. The same is done in screenwriting, but with cinematic techniques.

When distinguishing cinematic language, one must pay attention to how one feels when watching a particular scene. Screenwriters typically intend for meaning to be presented subtly and subconsciously. For instance, if a man in the shadows approaches a character from behind and the audience feels suspicious about that character, then that is more than likely what the film is trying to communicate. As Martin Scorsese says,

“You’re seeing it all in your mind’s eye, you’re inferring it. And this is the fourth aspect of cinema that’s so special. That inference. The image in the mind’s eye... For me it’s where the obsession began. It’s what keeps me going, it never fails to excite me. Because you take one shot, you put it together with another shot, and you experience a third image in your mind’s eye that doesn’t really exist in those two other images... And that has been called, appropriately, I believe, film language.” (Scorsese M. 2013)

When it comes to the representation of disabled characters in cinema, the cinematic language used to present the scene is equally important as the portrayal of the character. It is often noticed that the camera angle carries a subjective narrative and the background score used for accompanying these scenes uses sad background scores to invoke sympathy. Indian cinema has an inborn tendency to use minority representation either to supply comic relief or to evoke pity and fear in the audience. They take advantage of people’s lack of proper awareness and insensitivity towards the topic and hence regressive ideas are passed on to the psyches of an even wider group of spectators. This has to be viewed as a part of the agenda to enforce the utopian ideology in their land. It can also be perceived in connection with eugenic ideals, where flawless offspring are expected to be handed down. The cycle of demeaning and devaluing minority communities in movies has been continuing for ages until contemporary viewers started questioning it recently. The modern readers and theatregoers seem to be very well aware of the need for political correctness in films. They are alert when an individual or institution is degraded on screen.

Disability, for ages, has undoubtedly been used in movies as a punishment for the antagonist's ancestors’ long-forgotten sin. Even though Malayalam cinema has comparatively improved a lot in terms of adhering to political correctness, the film *Kaduva* (2022), directed by Shaji Kailas seems to have travelled back in time. The use of derogatory dialogues about disability in the beginning of the movie has faced much criticism on social media. The film uses an

insensitive comment in which the protagonist Kaduvakunnel Kuriyachen (Prithviraj Sukumaran) blames parents for their children's disabilities. The self-proclaimed virtuous hero passes an unmotivated comment — that disabled children are born because of their parents' sins — in order to support his argument that the antagonist Joseph Chandy IPS (Vivek Oberoi) is not morally upright. This comment is made almost at the beginning of the movie and Joseph Chandy is introduced moments before the controversial scene appears. On the other hand, Kuriyachen is given a long narrative entry as a hero who is wealthy, influential and morally upright. When we analyse the cinematic language used in the particular scene, the camera is placed at a slightly lower angle to show the character of Kuriyachen in a powerful position as he makes the remark. As Joseph Chandy leaves, the camera traces Kuriyachen from bottom to top and comes around at shoulder level and places itself at an angle below the shoulder placing him in a powerful position. The scene is interjected with two point-of-view shots in between. The visual treatment of the whole scene glorifies Kuriyachen and the music score that accompanies the scene builds tensions and has an upbeat heroic element to it. "For some bizarre reason, our filmmakers have often used the outdated belief surrounding bad karma ending in disability in various films. The subtext being that either they are being punished for their sins or for those committed by the parents" (Menon N. 2019). Due to mass criticism, the makers later apologised and removed (muted) the particular dialogue from the film. It is important to address these issues with sensitivity because it concerns the lives of so many people including disabled individuals as well as their families.

A similar approach is adapted in Renji Panicker's *Roudram* (2008), where Mammooty's character reasserts the power of karma, by cursing the villain that he deserves to undergo the consequences of his actions. The villain is also told that he deserves to live with a 'half-body' and crawl all his life as a repentance for the sins he has committed, because death is too convenient. Although the scene means to convey that traitors will have to encounter the results of their wrongdoings, the instance that accompanies it is questionable. *Kattu* (2017) directed by Arun Kumar Aravind has also a scene where the Moopan or the local judge of the village remarks that he had even punished his own daughter severely for her wrongdoing by sentencing her to spend the rest of her life with a man who is disabled. He further goes on to state that it is the most dreadful form of punishment she can receive in her life. The subjectivity in the cinematic language in such instances cannot be ignored as a close up shot is shown as the Moopan makes this remark.

There can also be inappropriate scenes and conversations in cinema due to the makers' lack of direct experience with the topic. Tracing this portrayal, a

suitable example is the Malayalam films directed by Vinayan that have created multiple outlashes in progressive movie groups on social media in recent times. They are basically filmic representations that demonstrate social/cultural insensitivity towards disability. His works had not been questioned over the first one and a half decades of the 21st century as the audience then were not as politically aware as today's. In *Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum* (1999), it is evident that the helplessness of the protagonist Ramu (Kalabhavan Mani), who is blind, is marketed in order to gain the sympathy of the audience. His father (Bharath Gopy), who is bed-ridden, is another disabled character who often rebukes his son for his blindness. His lover who is mute, is used as a rape victim, to evoke sympathy, and to send out the message that the likelihood of deaf or mute women getting sexually assaulted is high. The protagonist and his family live on the charity of the local landlord. Addressing disability in connection with charity is also a part of the discourse of pity. The movie intentionally tries to convey that the life of a disabled person is full of tragedy. *Karumadikuttan* (2001), is no different in its portrayal of a mentally disabled character played by Kalabhavan Mani. The movie as a whole lacks sensibility and logic in its portrayal of Karumadikuttan. It presents various instances showing that Karumadikuttan is incapable of discerning adulthood and their world. He is shown as a weak and helpless child who takes orders from others and executes them without any choice. He is incapable of feeling any serious emotions. In one instance when Karumadikuttan seeks help from the antagonist in the movie, he is forced to sing a song in exchange. The song Karumadikuttan sings ("*Nenjudukkinte thalamthudippil*") is full of depth and meaning referring to his sorrowful plight. This instance defies the logic of the character presented to us so far in the movie.

Oomappenninu Uriyadappayyan (2002) is Vinayan's another sentimental portrayal of the problematic relationship of a deaf woman (Kavya Madhavan) and a mute boy (Jayasurya). Instead of using a full, proper language, unwanted gestures and facial expressions are used in order to converse with the disabled characters, which turn out to be pure mockery. The movie is a classic example of the director not doing his homework or researching about deaf and mute people. The movie also portrays the social balancing act of pairing a disabled person with another disabled person. *Meerayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum* (2003) revolves around the lives of the hero and his disabled sister (Ambili Devi), who considers herself to be a lifelong burden for the family. The brother's efforts to make the two ends meet and secure his sister's future go in vain when she commits suicide. Even though Meera is capable of doing daily chores like cooking by herself, her actions are given a sentimental tone and the director makes attempts to glorify it. This indicates how the filmmaker

has used disability to assert the wrong notion that a disabled person cannot possibly have an independent life. The eagerness of non-disabled people to associate disability with dependence has rooted deeply in their subconscious minds. The movie suffers from multitudinous flaws in its representation of disability and the narration of the story. In another instance, Muthu severs off the hand of a fake *guru* who comes under the pretense of healing Meera and eventually tries to rape her. When the case is in court, the lawyer representing Muthu tells the judge that Muthu cannot even afford a lawyer to represent him and it is the Disabled's Welfare Association that has made arrangements for his representation in court. Previously, we often hear other characters say that Muthu is ready to spend any amount of money to treat Meera and get her better. Despite all this, we never see Muthu attempting to at least seek the help of the Disabled's Welfare Association to get a wheelchair for Meera. The director conveniently lets Meera crawl throughout the movie to evoke sympathy in the audience. In its ironic climax where Meera attempts suicide and Muthu receives news that someone has agreed to marry Meera, we see the age-old 'fate's justice' where the crippled/flawed/burdensome dies and emancipates the hero.

Though *Albhuthadweep* (2005) — inspired by Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* — tries to celebrate the lives of dwarf people, it is found that one of the heroes as well as all the women in it are 'normal', 'perfect' beings. Dwarfism is considered as one of the 21 disabilities recognised by RPwD Act, 2016 as it restricts their access to mainstream spaces and facilities. Though dwarfism is used as a comic interlude for ages, this movie seems to provide a different approach, but it inadvertently ends up portraying their physical feature as a limitation. The movie portrays its dwarfed men as valiant in the beginning but towards the end, when their island is attacked by giants, they are shown as incapable of defending their land and women and seek the help of the 'normal' Indian airforce men who accidentally land on their island. There is even a song-scene where the dwarfed protagonist and young prince Gajendran (Ajay Kumar) is shown as a tall man romancing with his love interest.

Vinayan movies can be seen to evoke pity, helplessness and sympathy for people with disabilities. The common feature in all of Vinayan's directorial ventures about disabled people is that the disabled person is a curse. There will always be a character to make this remark about the character with disability. The scene is apparently followed by a sad background score to evoke sympathy. The disabled character is shown to be dependent and suffering from internalised ableism. Internalised ableism is the habit of some disabled individuals projecting their own negative traits due to the belief that they do

not belong (to a person or a place). This yielding characteristic may be another form of colonisation, where they are forced to comply at the request or order of a dominant group. Such persons hold the view that they are unworthy of good things as a result of the conditioning they have undergone, yet do not realise that they are oppressed by themselves.

Another instance of internalised ableism can be seen in *Mazhayethum Munpe* (1995) directed by Kamal. The movie manifests how one of its two female protagonists, who is disabled, finds herself to be a burden for her lover. Uma (played by Shobhana) is influenced by the comments of Sruthi (Annie), who is a representative of the coloniser — the non-disabled society — when she reinforces the myth that a disabled woman is not a ‘normal’ person to get married happily. Eventually, Uma continues to believe that her body is not sufficient to please her non-disabled partner’s eyes and hence withdraws from the love relationship thinking that he is already doing too much by loving her. This points to her inferiority complex and submissive behaviour, as well as the misconception that disabled women are not fit to lead a family life because they do not possess the qualities of a ‘good wife’.

Carrying out a detailed perusal of the representations of disability in films that star Dileep in the leading role, they are mostly either problematic or controversial as they uphold the notions of normalcy. Many scenes in *Kunjikoonan* (2002), the popular Malayalam movie directed by Sasi Shanker promote the active gaze of the dominant mainstream culture. Kunjan (Dileep), a man with a hunchback, looks for a ‘normative’ life partner, but it is shown that his dreams are shattered when he sees a dwarf woman in a bride-seeing ceremony. This scene is clearly used as comic banter, where both of these characters tremble with outrage upon seeing each other. Even though the supporting actors find it as a usual thing, Kunjan as well as the prospective bride feel that they are humiliated by getting themselves introduced to a marriage proposal that involves disabled beings. On the contrary, Dileep’s double role, Prasad, is depicted to have a ‘perfectly-crafted’ body structure, with whom the audience is unable to connect emotionally the way they sympathise with the sentiments of Kunjan. The portrayal of the disabled female protagonist and the usual approach to the theme is also noticeable. Kunjan later comes across a blind woman (Navya Nair), with whom he falls in love, and this unison may or may not be a result of the makers’ presumption that she cannot possibly love him back after seeing his spinal curvature if she happens to be non-disabled.

The makers of the 2006 movie *Pachakuthira* (directed by Kamal) have also played the sympathy card and thus manipulated the audience emotionally with the portrayal of the life and love relationship of a boy with intellectual

disability. In *Punjabi House*, Dileep acts like a deaf man throughout the movie and occasional comedy scenes related to the same follow. In the climax, when his childhood lover comes across the fact that the person he is in love with is mute, she forgives him and is glad that he is 'offering' his life and resources for a disabled girl (Menon N. 2019). *Sound Thoma* (2013) directed by Vysakh places its focus on Thoma, a man with cleft lip and a deformity in sound. Dileep's over-dramatised character along with his voice is primarily used for comic purpose and the mocking scenes are proportioned by songs and dance. The male protagonists in the Jayaraj-film *Thilakkam* (2003) and the Lohithadas film *Chakkaramuthu* (2006) are believed to have an intellectual disability since both of these characters possess similar traits in terms of their body language and mannerism.

The sexuality of the disabled is a topic not much discussed in Indian popular cinema. Visual media often forgets to open up the various dimensions of the questions on the sexual orientation of persons with disabilities. The trend in depicting the disabled as asexual or impotent has long been normalised in commercial cinema. Desexualising disabled bodies diverts attention from individuals to physical structures and misleads the non-disabled audience to believe that disabled people lack sexual desires. There needs to be a paradigm shift in Indian cinema culture, that opens vistas to debates on gender and sexuality of the disabled and the queer. While trying to foreground aesthetic, traditional and moral values, society considers the changes in one's body despicable. In *Kattu*, Muthulakshmi's (Varalaxmi Sarathkumar) father proudly sentences her to spend the rest of her life with a man who cannot move his arms or legs. But his statements carry undertones of her leading a sexless life and her time spent serving her husband's daily needs. The film portrays the life of her husband as fated to lead a life of celibacy.

Kerala's cultural history often puts so much pressure on its people to conform to bodily norms. *Sooryamanasam* (1992) directed by Viji Thampi, is believed to be inspired by the American film *Of Mice and Men* (1992) based on John Steinbeck's story that shares the same name. The movie begins with a note that Patturumees (Mammooty) has the strength of six men but the brain of a six-year old. His only companion is his mother and he is constantly rejected by society because of his child-like features. The villagers kill him at the end due to the misconception that he causes social issues in the locality, giving a tragic climax to the movie. This character, as it is perceived as 'abnormal', is now widely used as a meme material in fan fight clubs for his intellectual disability and difference in physical appearance.

Taking broad inroads into history, it is crystal clear that most of the celebrated classes have obstructed the growth of marginalised minorities across the entire

socio-economic spectrum, placing them far away from the spotlight. ‘Blacking up’, a style used mainly in English movies, is about non-black actors putting on blackface makeup to portray people of colour. Likewise, the practice of using non-disabled actors to perform as disabled characters is called ‘cripping up’ in the entertainment industry. Such misrepresentations invalidate people’s cultural history and identity, calling attention to the need to ensure representation in films. It is open to debate whether the ‘invisibility’ of disability happens as an effort to keep the chances open to skilful entertainers in the industry, but it is again an issue that necessitates cross-examination because women characters, for instance, are never performed by male artists. *Thirike* (2021), directed by George Kora and Sam Xavier, is a revolutionary work that questions the practice of casting non-disabled performers in disabled roles. The role of Ismu a.k.a Sebu is carried out smoothly by Gopi Krishnan, an actor with Down syndrome, probably the first one to be in the lead role in Malayalam cinema. Guaranteeing self-representation is an essential requirement while making cinema, as it is a matter of the identity of a particular group, which *Thirike* has beautifully captured.

The systemic fashion of infantilising disabled adults is frequently seen in many Malayalam disability films. In *Thirike*, 26-year-old Ismu is infantilised by his foster parents throughout the movie. This practice, in a way, is a reflection of the patronising or ‘helping’ mentality of an ableist community. As a reaction to the same, important decisions regarding disabled individuals are mostly taken by their immediate non-disabled relative or caretaker due to the prejudice that they cannot take decisions in a mature and responsible way.

Actor Jayasurya’s disabled characters need special mention. His recent decision not to act in movies that involve persons with disabilities, has invited public attention. He states that so many disabled roles are coming to him and this makes activists think that it is easy to get him to take part in disability movies. In his latest crime thriller *John Luther* (2022) directed by Abhijit Joseph, he plays the role of a police officer who loses his hearing in a brawl. He is not discriminated against by his family or friends due to his hearing loss and is not portrayed as an officer who sits back and relax due to the same. Rather, he joins back the force, carrying around a recorder along with a hearing aid, to play the voices again. Talking about individual approaches to life and disability, someone who is born disabled and someone who becomes disabled at a later point of life due to a mishap may not take it in the same way. When the former comes to terms with it at a very young age and lives with it, the latter takes a long time to acknowledge the new way of life. This aspect makes John Luther’s character different — accepting the change and getting back to life within a short span.

Coming to his role of a radio jockey who loses his voice in the film *Meri Awaz Suno* (2022) directed by Pranesh Sen, it is very unpleasant to watch his speech therapist emotionally torturing the patient. Speech language pathologists criticise the movie stating that therapy does not work the way it is shown in it, because they always study multiple research papers for the best evidence-based practice and never adopt techniques of public humiliation or embarrassment, no matter how severe the client's condition is. However, professional boundaries are not maintained between the therapist and the mute protagonist in the movie and she even intervenes in his personal life, which is not the ethical way to rehabilitate a disabled person.

Beautiful (2011) directed by V. K. Prakash showcases a myth-busting scene in which Stephen, a quadriplegic man, remarks that he is able to smile in bed only because he got enough money and those who do not have money or privilege may not be able to stay happy in their disabled state. The movie offers a positive approach towards disability when Stephen mocks the mainstream concept that disabled people are expected to inspire others because they live a different way of life. When the journalist who takes his interview says she feels motivated to do something for the disabled/underprivileged, he asks if she is ready to marry him, to which she reacts with a shocked expression. This scene implies how the disabled are objectified merely as an inspirational source whereas having a life with them is the worst nightmare for many. In addition, the scene in which he experiences a bike ride in the rain has tried to address that wheelchair users also desire to go out and experience the most common things just like others do.

Bangalore Days (2014), directed by Anjali Menon, also offers a shifting paradigm from the views of dependence and institutionalisation of disabled persons. It is important to note that disability is not used as a tool for inspiration in the movie. One among the three female protagonists (Parvathy Thiruvothu) is a radio jockey and a wheelchair user, but her identity as a disabled person is not mentioned anywhere in her talks, even though she has multiple chances to employ it to 'inspire' some idle non-disabled listeners. Her disability is not disclosed to the audience until the male protagonist meets her for the first time. She is presented as an independent and educated person, who takes pride in her identity as a person with a disability. She is pursued by a professional rider who decides to marry her — another way of conquering stereotypes, by displaying inter-abled relationships on screen.

The imbalance between the line of thought of a disabled person and the 'norm' may generate tension in the surrounding and this can cause the peer group to be unable to understand the particular person's mental functioning. The 2017 Srikant Murali movie *Aby* is designed to display the life of Aby (Vineeth

Sreenivasan), a young, brilliant boy who is awed by the ways machines work and whose life motto is to fly. Though the film does not mention the name of any mental condition, it refers to him as a 'special baby', and there are indirect implications that he has mild autism or Asperger's Syndrome. His mother dies and the alcoholic father who works in an insurance company sentimentalises his condition using Aby, in order to meet his targets and to achieve his goals. Aby is seen to be lacking social skills, making his parents believe that he is deaf and cannot vocalise. The mainstream people around him seem to be ignorant of his skills and inventions, and people take advantage of his social awkwardness. The 2018 movie *Hey Jude* directed by Shyamaprasad also tries to depict the struggles of the protagonist with Asperger's syndrome, a mild form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Jude (Nivin Pauly) finds it difficult to socialise and understand human emotions, due to which his father labels him as irresponsible, immature and lazy, whereas he has extraordinary intelligence in mathematics and marine science. He cannot make direct eye contact and he is often the victim of the personal jokes of his colleagues. His parents are later educated about his intellectual state but are still worried if there is any treatment for his condition, to which his friend, Dr. Sebastian (whose daughter — Jude's only friend — has bipolar disorder) says that there is nothing to be cured through treatment and that parents should not be an obstacle in their journey towards being 'normal'. ASD is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) and as an intellectual disability in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 of India. Considering the fact that autism has not been discussed much in Malayalam cinema, these movies have played a role in introducing to the Kerala audience that it has different levels and types and hence the kind of support they require can also be different.

Athmakadha (2010) directed by Premlal portrays a blind couple who work at a candle factory and lead an independent life, which is what differentiates it from many other films about people with visual impairment (Pal J. n.d.). His daughter also loses her vision towards the end of the movie, which she embraces without much worry, as she is prepared by her father to deal with future events. The 2019 Emcy Joseph film *Vikruthi* based on a true story, shows a deaf protagonist (Suraj Venjaramood) who is naive and the epitome of righteousness. In the film, the deaf couple is not shown to be isolated or discriminated against due to their disability and it is clear that their immediate circle is also empathetic and compassionate towards them, giving a positive outlook. But it is disturbing to see the film trying to make him symbolic of goodness and virtue. Though he faces social media bullying for his misrepresentation as a drunk man sleeping on metro train and his life turns

upside down after the incident, he is still found to be forgiving those who commit the crime because he cannot stand anyone struggling in front of him. The climactic scene reaffirms the common mindset that disabled people are flawless at heart and they are bound to forgive and forget.

Apart from visual language, musical expression plays an essential role in conveying the emotions of the characters. Music shapes these emotional responses and helps the viewers experience the soul of movie scenes. Whereas some songs make them travel with the characters and experience the same emotional sway, a few others take them to an imaginary space. It is said that music has healing power but if it is not used the right way, it can cause the opposite effect. Knowing that it is a powerful tool that works like magic, filmmakers make use of it to sentimentalise and market human vulnerability.

Disability is one among different human experiences and identities. It is a form of diversity that is mostly misunderstood as a 'special ability'. In a world that claims 'ability', living with a disability becomes challenging when proper facilities and accessibility services are not provided to meet their needs. Malayalam cinema has always conformed to the conventional norms that glorify non-disabled, heterosexual, masculine bodies where minority communities are treated as 'the other'. Over the course of time, the invisibility of disability in movies gave way to mocking, objectifying and commodifying persons with disabilities. The concept of normalcy presented in popular media and mainstream culture is complex, causing marginalised sections to be subjugated further. Ableism is still prevalent in movies, where they continue to create a hierarchy of disability stigma, negative stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in multiple ways. Not many movies have considered the inclusion of non-visible disabilities. Even those that come out with the label 'disability films' sometimes seem to be doing very little justice to themselves. The fact that all disabilities are not visible at first glance is still unknown to the majority. Owing to misrepresentations, the image that people keep in mind about a disabled person is that of an impaired physical structure. But there are physical and mental conditions that are beyond sight and measure. Each disability is culturally diverse just like any other identity related to human existence. Since the ordinary people do not possess much knowledge or awareness about it, it is through films and books that they acquire a clear idea about many activities. But when these representations go wrong, it affects the socio-political understanding of the general public, making them puzzled about how and how not to deal with these sensitive issues. This is why terminologies also matter when it comes to art and literature. Each frame and colour shown in cinema plays an integral part in influencing public opinion. In the cinema legacy that focuses on promoting an 'ideal' world where there

are no impaired bodies/minds, modern cinephiles can set it right by ensuring inclusion of diverse categories and rectifying the asymmetric practices in our cinematic heritage — because the real world is heterogeneous and signifies diversity.

References

- Aravind, A. K. (Director). (2017). Kattu [Film]. Karmaayug Films.
- Jayaraj. (Director). (2003). Thilakkam [Film]. Hamsadhwani Films.
- Joseph, A. (Director). (2022). John Luther [Film]. Alonsa Films.
- Joseph, E. (Director). (2019). Vikruthi [Film]. Century Films.
- Kailas, S. (Director). (2022). Kaduva [Film]. Prithviraj Production.
- Kamal. (Director). (1995). Mazhayethum Munpe [Film]. Murali Films.
- Kamal. (Director). (2006). Pachakuthira [Film]. Varnachithra.
- Kora, G. & Xavier, S. (Directors). (2021). Thirike [Film]. Nationwide Pictures.
- Lohithadas. (Director). (2006). Chakkaramuthu [Film]. Seven Arts Films.
- Menon, A. (Director). (2014). Bangalore Days [Film]. Anwar Rasheed Entertainments & Weekend Blockbusters.
- Menon, N. (2019, May 11). Pitied and Desexualised: How Malayalam Cinema has Portrayed People with Disability. The News Minute.
<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/pitied-and-desexualised-how-malayalam-cinema-has-portrayed-people-disability-101614>
- Murali, S. (Director). (2017). Aby [Film]. Little Big Films.
- Pal, J. (n.d.). The Portrayal of Disability in Indian Cinema: An Attempt at Categorisation. Phalanx: A Quarterly Review for Continuing Debate.
https://www.phalanx.in/pages/article_i009_Portrayal_Disability_Indian_Cinema.html
- Panicker, R. (Director). (2008). Roudram [Film]. Marikar Films.
- Prakash, V. K. (Director). (2011). Beautiful [Film]. Yes Cinemas.
- Premlal. (Director). (2010). Athmakadha [Film]. Pavithram Creation.

- Raffi & Mecartin. (Directors). (1998). Punjabi House [Film]. New Saga Films.
- Sankar, R. (Director). (2015). Su Su Su Sudhi Vathmeekam [Film]. Dreams N Beyond.
- Scorsese, M. (2013, August 15). The Persisting Vision: Reading the Language of Cinema. The Film Foundation.
<https://www.film-foundation.org/the-persisting-vision>
- Sen, P. (Director). (2022). Meri Awaz Suno [Film]. Universal Cinema.
- Shanker, S. (Director). (2002). Kunjikoonan [Film]. Galaxy Films.
- Shyamaprasad. (Director). (2018). Hey Jude [Film]. Ambalakkara Global Films.
- Thampi, V. (Director). (1992). Sooryamanasam [Film]. Nandhana films.
- Vinayan. (Director). (1999). Vasanthiyum Lakshmiyum Pinne Njanum [Film]. Thriveni Productions.
- Vinayan. (Director). (2001). Karumadikuttan [Film]. Surabhi Cinema.
- Vinayan. (Director). (2002). Oomappenninu Uriyadappayyan [Film]. Shirdi Sai Creations.
- Vinayan. (Director). (2003). Meerayude Dukhavum Muthuvinte Swapnavum [Film]. Kolath Films
- Vinayan. (Director). (2005). Albhuthadweep [Film]. Gulflin Productions.
- Vysakh. (Director). (2013). Sound Thoma [Film]. Priyanjali Films.

An Analysis of Data Journalism Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities

Communication & Journalism Research
11 (2) pp 27-40
©The Author (s) 2022
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc.ac.in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Navaneeth T M *

Research Fellow, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

Muhammadali Nelliullathil

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut

Abstract

This paper details the classroom experience of recently introduced data journalism elective course at University of Calicut. It examines the factors that influence journalism students' decisions to pursue this course, as well as the difficulties instructors face during the preparation and teaching stages. Two questionnaire surveys were undertaken, the first before the course to explore student expectations and concerns about the subject, and the second to collect student feedback. It also discusses how to improve the data journalism course.

Keywords

Data journalism education, Computational journalism, Data visualisation

Introduction

Despite being a nebulous term (Lewis, 2021), data journalism is thriving in newsrooms, and its newsroom and academic trends have reached India. The growth of data journalism is dependent on multiple disciplines including social sciences, data and computer sciences, data analytics, information design and communication (Heravi, 2019). While journalistic values remains as its core, what sets data journalism apart is the new kind of information sourcing and storytelling practices in form of computational data analytics and data visualisation. This shift from traditional practices presents challenges not only for the journalists but also for the journalism educators (Kashyap & Bhaskaran, 2020). The requirements include better data literacy to use both public and private databases, as well as robust digital literacy to use web 2.0 technologies (Flew et al., 2012).

The emergence of data journalism in India was gradual, but both traditional media outlets (such as The Hindu, The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, etc.) and digital news outlets (such as India Spend, Mint, and Factly) quickly

* Correspondence: Email: navaneeth.mcj@gmail.com

realised the potential of data-driven storytelling. Some initiatives were recognised internationally (India Spend received a "honourable mention" in Data Journalism awards in 2016 and Hindustan Times won awards at the Malofiej International Infographics Awards in 2016), while others went on to collaborate with international players for data-driven investigations (Indian Express worked on the "Panama Papers" project). But still there are some intrinsic and extrinsic factors hampering the development of the field in India. Intrinsic factors include the smaller size of the data journalism team and the inability to create interactive visualisations and the extrinsic factors include the availability of data, hesitation of government officials to provide data, and the delay in making data available to the public (Kashyap et al., 2020). Kashyap et al. (2020) also points out that some news organisations are creating a problematic situation of "data for the sake of data" by using minimal data visualisations with data aggregates as the source which takes the investigative side out of the data journalism.

Journalism schools face similar problems in teaching data journalism. Although the first step towards offering data journalism courses has been made, lack of teachers with expertise in data turned out as a major problem (Davies & Cullen, 2016; Lewis, 2021). The vague definition of data journalism itself is causing confusion among educators, which sparked a discussion about what should be covered in the curriculum - whether to include web design techniques, coding, and if included, does it require the instructors from the journalism background. Scholars have also looked into the issue of journalism students' math aversion as a challenge for data journalism education (Davies & Cullen, 2016; Green, 2018).

To move away from "data for the sake of data" and towards data-based investigative journalism, newsrooms in India must undergo a transformation. For this, newsrooms requires journalists who are proficient with data and have a strong technical foundation (Kashyap & Bhaskaran, 2020). This also point to a need for a development in data journalism pedagogy. It's also an opportunity for journalism programmes to positively impact the media industry by graduating future journalists who are proficient in data journalism.

Scholarly works are emerging in the data journalism teaching, student experience and curriculum. However, the majority of them come from places like the United States, Europe, Australia, and Hong Kong. Kashyap and Bhaskaran (2020) in their notable work call for case studies from India regarding data journalism education and how it's different from that of other countries. This research is based on the teacher and student experience of data journalism course on its introduction for second-year post-graduate students at the University of Calicut in Kerala. Data journalism was one of the three

electives offered for the fourth semester journalism students. Students had to take two out of the three electives. While outlining the challenges, this paper also explores solutions using existing models for teaching data journalism.

Data journalism elective course

There are 5 modules in the data journalism elective course, MCJ 403. The introduction module covers the history of data journalism, computer assisted reporting, precision journalism, data literacy, and data journalism initiatives from India and around the world. The second module covers developing a data story, various data sources, and data sourcing techniques. The third module is about creating insights from data and the fourth module is about data visualisation. Third module was also covering portions regarding quantitative literacy – basic statistics, simple calculations and the verification of data. Module two to five also include the practical training of data journalism tools. The course plan is prepared in such a way that theory class and practical class are alternated. Tools introduced to students as part of the practical training were MS Excel, Google Sheet, Tabula, Table Capture, Flourish and Data Wrapper.

Objectives of the study

1. To explore the factors that influenced students' decision to opt for data journalism elective course.
2. To review the student attitude towards data journalism after the course.
3. To analyse the challenges in teaching data journalism.
4. To discuss the changes that can be implemented in the data journalism classroom.

Methodology

Two online questionnaire surveys were conducted to find out what students thought of the data journalism elective course before and after the course. Both the first (S1) and second (S2) questionnaire surveys were conducted in the months of 2022, with the S1 taking place in June and the S2 in August. 18 of the 21 enrolled students in the course completed both surveys. Questionnaire consisted both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

The S1 asked questions to determine why students chose data journalism as an elective, their attitude towards mathematics and their familiarity with data management and tools. Two of the 15 questions were open-ended, and the rest were closed-ended. S1 was administered after a one-hour introductory class of the course. S2 was conducted after the last class of the course consisted of 16 questions. One of these was an open-ended question. The main content of the questions in this survey were to study students' attitude towards data journalism after the course, their confidence in data journalism skills and suggestions for improving the course.

Due to the small sample size, the survey responses are presented as raw data in the findings part. Students' responses to open-ended questions were coded and analysed using the 'Taguette' qualitative data analysis tool. The responses were read and reread and identified major themes in each set of responses. Quotes from the responses that support each theme was organised accordingly. A table for each question with the themes and number of supported quotes was created. The discussion is based on this data.

Findings of S1

The 21 students who chose the data journalism course were all female. The 18 survey participants all had backgrounds in the humanities and arts. Therefore, these data are not useful for determining how individuals from various backgrounds perceive the data journalism course.

The decision to opt data journalism

When asked which elective was their first preference only 6 answered data journalism (Table 1).

Table 1

Names of electives offered and number of students opted as their first preference

Question	Response	Frequency
Out of the electives provided, which was your first choice?	Data journalism	6
	Photo journalism	12
	Political economy of Indian media	0

Only 5 students (agree – 4, strongly agree – 1) indicated that they would have taken data journalism even if some additional electives had been offered (Table 2). 8 students out of 18 thought choosing data journalism as an elective was an easy decision, while 2 disagreed (Table 2).

Table 2

Preference for data journalism and difficulty in opting data journalism

Question	Response				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Even if I had other options, I would have taken Data Journalism as one of my elective	2	6	5	4	1
Selecting Data Journalism as an elective was an easy decision for me.	0	2	8	7	1

There was an open-ended question about the motivation for selecting data journalism as an elective. The responses were coded and divided into five themes. Interestingly, 6 responses indicated that taking data journalism was a result of the lack of elective options. Also, students believe that studying data journalism will lead to better job opportunities and careers in journalism (6 supporting statements). Three of the statements show that taking the data journalism elective was motivated by an interest in statistics, data, mathematics, and data visualisation. Other themes identified were ‘interest in studying a new area’, and ‘scope of the subject’ (Table 3).

Responses to another open-ended question indicates that most students had no concerns about choosing data journalism. Themes identified from the responses and frequency of each theme is given in Table 4. Some people expressed concern that statistics and math might play a significant role in data journalism (2 supporting responses), and that the practical content of the curriculum would be challenging to learn (3 supporting responses). Another theme identified was whether data journalism could be studied in a condensed semester given the time constraints (1 supporting response) (Table 4).

Table 3

Motivation for selecting data journalism as elective, themes identified and frequency of supporting statements

Themes of Responses	Frequency
Career or Job prospect	6
Interest in studying a new area	5
Lack of other options	6
Interest in data analysis, visualization and interpretations	3
Scope of the subject	5

Table 4

Concerns when choosing data journalism elective, themes identified and frequency of supporting statements

Themes of Responses	Frequency
No concern	5
Concerns related to Mathematics and statistics	2
Concern related to limited time	1
Concerns related to practical content of the data journalism	3

12 respondents (agree -10, strongly agree – 2) considered their attitude towards mathematics as a factor in choosing data journalism (Table 5). 6 had ‘neutral’ experience to mathematics in school classes (Table 5).

Table 5

Do the students considered their attitude towards mathematics while choosing data journalism and students’ experience of mathematics in school classes

Question	Response				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I considered my attitude towards Mathematics while selecting the Data Journalism elective course	1	4	1	10	2
I did enjoy studying mathematics in school classes	4	1	6	3	4

Prior experience in data journalism

Only one out of 18 students had previously attended classes or workshops related to data journalism/data visualization. 11 had previously learned spreadsheet software. Of these, 10 were able to enter and visualize data in spreadsheet software. 8 students marked positive response (agree – 6, strongly agree – 2) to the statement ‘I do carefully read the data visualizations and infographics those are getting published in the news media’, 9 marked ‘neutral’.

Findings of S2

Perception of the data journalism course

Upon their completion of the data journalism course, 13 respondents said they felt more interested in the topic (12 - agree, 1 - strongly agree). 13 people responded positively to the claim that choosing the data journalism as the elective was the right decision (10-agree, 3 - strongly agree) (Table 6)

A Similar numbers of students responded positively (agree – 8, strongly agree – 4) to the statement ‘I think the data processing and data visualization skills I have studied will be useful in my career’ (Table 6). 16 out of 18 said that they would attend if more data journalism workshops or classes were provided.

Table 6

Interest in data journalism after the course and do students feel choosing data journalism elective was the right choice

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
After attending data journalism elective, I feel more interested in the subject	1	1	3	12	1
I believe that choosing data journalism as an elective was the right choice.	1	0	4	10	3

Table 7

Do students think the skill taught in the classroom will be useful in their career and do they feel more updated in the field of journalism?

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think the data processing and data visualization skills I have studied will be useful in my career	1	1	4	8	4
By attending the data journalism elective, I feel more updated in the field of journalism	1	1	4	9	3

Data journalism skills

14 out of 18 gave a positive response to the statement that they later practiced the skills taught in the data journalism class. (12 -agree, 2-strongly agree). Also they feel more confidence in basic statistics. But only half of the responses share the opinion that they are confident to analyse and visualize small or large data sets (agree – 8, strongly agree – 1). (Table 8)

Table 8*Student responses after the course on data journalism skills*

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I had practiced the practical skills that were taught in the classroom	2	0	1	12	2
I am confident that I can analyse any dataset, be it small or large, and create visualizations.	1	4	4	8	1
After attending data journalism elective, I feel I have a better understanding of basic statistics	1	1	3	11	2

Suggestions from students

The question to provide suggestions to make the data journalism course better was open-ended. The responses were coded and placed into three themes. The need for more practical-oriented classes emerged as the main theme (10 supporting statements). More in-class discussions to stimulate interest in data journalism (2 supporting statements) and more theory classes (2 supporting statements) were the other two themes (Table 9).

Table 9*Student suggestions to improve data journalism course , themes identified and frequency of supporting statements*

Theme	Frequency
More practical	10
Discussions to create more interest in the subject	2
More theory classes	2

Data Journalism Teaching Experience

The first step to teaching data journalism was to create a course plan based on the syllabus. Course plan was designed in a way that theory and practical session would alternate. A challenge in preparing the course plan was not having an idea of how much time would be required to teach each of the data journalism tools. Because it was thought that the students would find the coding portion of the course challenging, it was decided not to include it in plan. The tools included in the course plan are Microsoft Excel, Google Sheets, Tabula (tool to extract tables from PDF files), Table Capture (a browser extension to scrape tables from websites), Flourish and Datawrapper (online data visualization tools). The sources (book section, websites, videos etc.) on which each theoretical and practical sessions based on was noted in the course plan. Before starting the classes, the course plan was sent to students via email.

The examples that were included in addition to the theory section made it easier for the students to understand the lessons being taught. In each class, two students were given the assignment to identify a data story, the data source of that story and the manner in which the data is presented, they had to present this before the starting of each session. It was intended to make students understand the basic concepts of data sourcing, data visualization, etc. This exercise was very effective. Some parts of the syllabus were difficult for students to relate to. It was later discovered that this was a drawback of the teaching strategy used; students were more effective when providing hands-on training during the theory portions. This method was adopted after the first two modules.

The students were divided into groups for hands-on activities, and then each group was given a task. For instance, the first task was to extract information about traffic accidents in Kerala from a set of PDF file that was taken from the website of Kerala Police, and use Excel to draw useful conclusions from it. Each group looked at various factors, including the time of the accident, the vehicle involved, and the frequency of accidents in each district. Different table format in each files were making this exercise more challenging. Also some variable were missing in some of the files. Another challenge here was that the hands-on sessions took longer to complete than expected. Some of the exercises were completed after class. Some students struggled to use the data journalism tools and needed more time to complete the practical. Some students lacked proficiency with computers. Despite their best efforts, they found it difficult to keep up with the group during activities. One of the difficulties encountered during the preparation stage for the practical sessions was deciding which data to choose for the student exercise. At the same time it should interest the students and should be workable data.

Limited internet access was another challenge. Most of the exercises were designed to scrape data from the Internet. But due to the low speed of the internet, the activities are often delayed. There was only limited time for the practical sessions of data visualisation. Students quickly mastered the use of fundamental data visualisations like bar charts, line charts, and pie charts. However, despite their enthusiasm for creating data visualisation, they failed to recognise the loss of data that results from using the incorrect technique. The instructor had to give students a detailed explanation of the context in which each chart would be used.. Crowdsourcing of data and collecting data using Right to Information Act were discussed in class but due to time constraints these could not be executed as practical exercises.

Despite many challenges, data journalism classroom experience helped the instructor in understanding the areas that required upskilling.

Discussion

The first objective of this paper was to discover what factors influence students' decision to pursue data journalism as an elective. Only a few people chose data journalism as their first choice, and even fewer said they would have chosen it if other options had been available. This shows that only a small number of people chose data journalism because they were interested in data journalism or related topics. This is supported by student responses indicating a lack of interest in other elective subjects led to the selection of data journalism.

Students also believe that studying data journalism will lead to more job opportunities. A prior understanding of what data journalism is and why it is important may help students approach the subject with greater enthusiasm. A change to support this has been made in the latest revision of journalism syllabus. In which basic portions of data journalism included in courses like digital journalism and professional communication.

Majority of the students responding they feel more interested in data journalism after the course and that their decision to take up data journalism was right indicate the data journalism course was effective. Students also responded they felt more informed about the field of journalism and had improved their data journalism skills.

Initially, the course was designed to alternate between theory and practical sessions. Later, it was decided to make the practical portions the focal point because student attention was waning and some sections were difficult for the students to grasp. Not only were the students more engaged in the practical sessions, but providing theory classes in between the practical sessions also

helped them grasp those portions quickly. Making data journalism classes more practical has several advantages. Students can directly identify their errors while working with data, and the instructor can assist them in correcting them. It is observed as a newsroom-like setting, with the instructor serving as the editor (Broussard, 2015). Such a classroom which enables the student to understand and correct the errors could be important in Indian context, in which the newsrooms have only a handful of people who can handle data and mostly processing and proofreading the data could be assigned to a single individual.

Changes to be made in the data journalism classroom

As data journalism classes become more hands-on, the potential for blended learning also increases. Useful links and references were included in the course plan provided to the students. Asking the students to refer the online video tutorial ahead of the class and implementing practical exercises based on the tutorial in class can ensure timely completion of each session and can help the students with the self-paced learning (Davies, 2018; Sheridan Burns & Matthews, 2018). It will also help students to gain confidence in their ability to self-learn data journalism tools, which Bradshaw (2018) sees as a skill for solving a wide range of editorial problems. In addition to this, mentioning more tools that can be used in a variety of situations and providing instructions on how to learn them will benefit students in the future. Since the hands-on training can be conducted only to a limited number of software tools due to the time constraint, this could be a useful method to take students forward through in the learning curve.

There are several barriers to incorporate coding into a data journalism course in this context. Lack of uniform skill sets in the class, as well as a lack of time, are important factors in this. However, the course content will cover the use of coding in data journalism as well as methods for learning it in the future. Understanding data infrastructure is an important aspect of data literacy (Gray et al., 2018), so theoretical portions on data infrastructure will be added to the course plan.. The Right to Information Act and crowd sourcing as data sourcing practices were part of theory portion, but in future the plan is to include those in the practical exercises as well.

Conclusion

By investigating the implementation of a data journalism course at the University of Calicut in Kerala, this study attempted to contribute to the emerging discourse on data journalism pedagogy in India. This study discussed the students' attitudes towards the data journalism elective course as

well as the challenges encountered while teaching. One of the main reasons students chose data journalism was the expectation that it would help them with job opportunities. Some students considered data journalism as a stop gap option since no other interesting elective subjects were available to them. Students consider their attitudes towards mathematics before taking data journalism, but very few mention it as a concern for taking the subject. The majority of students reported an increase in their interest in the subject, as well as statistical and data analytical skills, after completing the course. Students suggested to add more practical classes as a way to improve the data journalism course. Although theory and practical classes were initially held in alternate sessions, students preferred classes that focused on hands-on activities. In the later stages of the course, a strategy of taking the theoretical portions in between these hands-on sessions was used. The study also discussed the future changes planned for the data journalism course.

A limitation of this study is that it is only suitable for understanding the trends of the classroom discussed here. None of the findings of this study can be generalized. In India itself, the background of students in each journalism school is very different. The data skills and computer skill each student carry might be different. Therefore, a model that is successful in one classroom may not work in another. As Kashyap & Bhaskaran (2020) indicates, a reflexive and iterative approach should be adopted considering the context.

References

- Bradshaw, P. (2018). Data Journalism Teaching, Fast and Slow. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 28(1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X18769395>
- Broussard, M. (2015). *Teaching Coding in Journalism Schools: Considerations for a Secure Technological Infrastructure*. Computation+ Journalism 2015 Conference, New York.
- Davies, K. (2018). Getting Started with Data Journalism: A Baby Steps Approach. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 28(1), 106–111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X18767460>
- Davies, K., & Cullen, T. (2016). Data Journalism Classes in Australian Universities: Educators Describe Progress to Date. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 26(2), 132–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X16668969>
- Flew, T., Spurgeon, C., Daniel, A., & Swift, A. (2012). The promise of computational journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 6, 157–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2011.616655>
- Gray, J., Gerlitz, C., & Bounegru, L. (2018). Data infrastructure literacy. *Big Data & Society*, 5(2), 2053951718786316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951718786316>

- Green, S. (2018). When the Numbers Don't Add Up: Accommodating Data Journalism in a Compact Journalism Programme. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 28(1), 78–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X18766767>
- Heravi, B. R. (2019). 3Ws of Data Journalism Education. *Journalism Practice*, 13(3), 349–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1463167>
- Kashyap, G., & Bhaskaran, H. (2020). Teaching Data Journalism: Insights for Indian Journalism Education. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 30(1), 44–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X20923200>
- Kashyap, G., Bhaskaran, H., & Mishra, H. (2020). “We need to find a revenue model”: Data journalists’ perceptions on the challenges of practicing data journalism in India. *Observatorio*, 14(2), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsOBS14220201552>
- Lewis, N. P. (2021). Defining and Teaching Data Journalism: A Typology. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 76(1), 78–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077695820924309>
- Sheridan Burns, L., & Matthews, B. (2018). First Things First: Teaching Data Journalism as a Core Skill. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 28, 91–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1326365X18765530>

Role of Social Media in Political Participation among Students

Communication & Journalism Research
11 (2) pp 41-52
©The Author (s) 2022
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Ansu Joseph

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

Lakshmi Pradeep *

Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to analyse how social media empower political participation among college going students. The study explores the extent of political activity of students across social media platforms. It associates social media political participation and political efficacy with various demographic variables and evaluates the influence of social media in their real life political participation.

Keywords

Social media, Online political participation, Political efficacy

Introduction

Since ancient times, communication has always been one of the top priorities of people. As we pass the era not only our basic living style differs but our mode of communication and attitudes towards technology also changes. Now being in an information age we are overwhelmed with different kinds of media and information. Today, a world without new media, particularly social media is literally unimaginable. People quickly switch to new media including social networking sites because of its unique features. With the help of technological advancement and the invention of web 2.0, long distance communication is very much possible. Today's popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, YouTube, Instagram and so on. Basically they all are social networking sites which connect one to another and the world. According to the world digital population of April 2022, around the world there are five billion internet users, which is approximately 63 percent of the total world population and among them 4.7 billion people is social media users, that is about 93 percent of them. According to Indian social media statistics of January 2022, the number of social media users in India has been

* Correspondence: Email: lakshmiprdp@gmail.com

growing and reached a steady rate of 467 million in 2022 because of the deep penetration of the internet. Internet has made social media popular and it acts as a fuel for social media users.

Due to the increased engagement and activeness of social media, its function increases day by day. People can participate and engage in the country's politics and related affairs and here one can use social media as a tool for propaganda or to enhance democracy. According to the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thoughts it is said that politics is "a process whereby a group of people, whose opinion or interest are initially divergent, reach collective decisions which are generally regarded as common policy" (Arackal, 2015). According to Mc Quail (1992), "political communication refers to all processes of information (including facts, opinions, beliefs, etc..), transmission, exchange engaged in by participants in the course of institutionalised political activities" (Arackal, 2015). Therefore, political communication can be referred to all types of communication in political context. Here the common public, political institutions, political parties, politicians or rulers can be participants in the communication process and in the communication process messages can be political information, beliefs, opinions, facts and so on. And this political communication engages the participants, which is a political activity.

Robert Dahl in 1973 declares that "political participation is an essential part of modern democracies because it enables the citizens to hold their government accountable" (Dahl, 1973).

When we look at the history of Indian elections we notice the rise of young voters and it has tremendous changes. According to the 'Youth in India' report, "the total youth population increased from 222.7 million in 1993 to 333.4 million in 2011 and it is projected to reach 371.4 million by 2021" so from these reports we will understand how important the youth is in the current Indian political scenario. Even though youth are so important, they don't have an opportunity to express their opinion in mainstream politics. So it's necessary to have political participation rather than just consuming political information and new media give a platform for political participation and engagement.

Social media is a platform where each individual can raise their voice. History of social media in political elections starts from the US presidential election in 2008. It was Barack Obama being the first African American US presidential candidate who used social media campaigns as an election strategy and it is the first known social media election which gave a new face for total politics

and election around the world. Social media became a milestone in the Indian political process and election campaign in 2014. It is considered as the “first social media election of the country”. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his political party who widely used social media and received huge benefits from the social media platforms. His social media tactics targeted educated youth and especially middle class groups. So as we said after the 2014 election India's every election whether it be general election, state elections or panchayat elections, social media has become an important part in political communication, participation and decision making. According to the election reports there were around 150 million fresh voters in the 2014 Indian general election. According to the study of Rodrigues in 2019 as of October, during the Indian general election, Modi had around 44 million followers in March of that year, Modi had around 433 million viewers for his YouTube videos. (Rodrigues, 2019), Modi had 30 million followers on Instagram. The BJP government and Narendra Modi used WhatsApp as a social media connecting platform to reach a huge amount of people. They use the personalization feature of WhatsApp to engage with people which became their success mantra. From this it is clear that social media and social media political participation can play a key role in Indian political structure. We can use this online political participation in social media to monitor our elected candidates so they have the thought that people are watching them so they will be more accountable in their services. Also our online political participation makes us understand more about political affairs and current political affairs. This can make youth more political. The politicians and political parties will understand that we are not someone who responds only at the time of votes and our each word and action will have an effect on them. This will make them remember about their election promises and fulfil them. Also when we actively use the online media for political participation this can influence the government policy and processes in such a way it can favour in realizing the needs of the common public.

Study Objectives

- To assess the strength and possibilities of social media as a vehicle to enhance political information in students.
- To explore the extent of student's political participation in social media.
- To find out whether social media political participation leads to political efficacy.
- To find the association between the demographic variables and the social media political participation and efficacy.

- To evaluate the extent to which social media political participation is reflected in real life.

Methodology and Theoretical analysis

To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher depends on a quantitative method for materialising the study. The objectives of the study demand such an approach to get needful data. In the present research, data collection is done through a survey method. The students of Calicut University campus become the population of the study. Purposive sampling technique is used to select the representatives of the population. The data is collected using well-constructed questionnaires administered among the selected participants. There are 154 participants in the study. The researcher conducts an online survey method using Google forms to send questionnaires and collect answers.

Goal System Theory

“Goal system theory suggests that human goals are represented mentally as cognitive constructs which are linked to sub goals and means of achievement” (Kruglanski et al., 2002). The theory explains how goals are chosen and pursued in a behavioural situation. “Attitudes towards objects, even if strong or toward behaviour, even if highly positive, are insufficient in and of themselves to incite action, instead human behaviour is driven by goals”(Kruglanski et.al, 2015). So according to the theory an individual needs to expose themselves to political information which can be either intentionally or even incidentally. The political information must be something which they regarded as relevant. And then they must conclude that there is a gap between the present state and an undesired or desired future state. The individual will have an explicit participatory goal only when the individual regards the early mentioned future state as attainable. Finally the individual needs to activate these goals against other goals in a behavioural situation. But even if there is no explicit participatory goal in individuals, social media usage can still lead to fostering the low effort form of political participation (Knoll, Matthes, and Heiss, 2018).

Cognitive Engagement Theory

The cognitive engagement theory explains that one's political participation is associated with their education, the information they receive, political knowledge and also based on their political satisfaction. So according to the theory an individual who is educated can access more information and hence they will be informed about the events and issues. So this can lead to political

participation among people. Also the political participation of an individual can further increase their satisfaction towards political and government policy. The theory was developed in the time of traditional media and traditional political participation. The media causes less cost for consumption of information and it leads to more political knowledge and increases in political interest among respondents and thereby can enhance political participation. (Salau, Hamid, and Ishak, 2017). In the current age of digital media we are more prone to social networking sites and we can access social media platforms if we have an internet facility and no other extra charge. So this attracts the attention of people and social media nowadays act as online political platform that gives as an opportunity to understand political information, events, controversies of political parties, politicians, government systems and so on. This can lead to increase in political interest and further can lead to online political participation and extend to political efficacy and real life political activities.

Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was prepared and distributed among the selected samples for the purpose of collecting data. The questions have been written to fulfill the objective of the study. The data was collected from the respondents using a purposive sampling method, strictly to students who use social media. The tests used in SPSS include Frequency Distribution test, Chi-Square test, Normality Test, Kruskal Wallis test and Mann Whitney U test. Data analysed were given as tables.

Sample profile

The sample profile of the study is based on the demographic variables gender, age and qualification. Among the 154 respondents, 78 were females and 76 were males. Also the pattern of social media usage for political information, most used social media, time spent on social media platform, political interest, political affiliation social media used for political information, time spent on social media to assess political information, social media as a vehicle to enhance of political information, extent of online political participation in social media, effect of online political participation on online political efficacy, to find the association between the demographic variables and the social media political participation and efficacy, to evaluate the extent to which online political participation is reflected in real life are assessed from the chosen samples.

Analysis and Discussion

The findings of the first objective, political information through online social media shows that the majority of respondents agree that the usage of social media helps them widely understand various aspects of contemporary politics and political parties, actions, policies and also controversies. The findings of the second objective, political participation through social media platforms shows that the majority disagree with their social media online political participation. But the extent of social media political participation increases in each level. When correlated the levels of online political participation with demographic variable it is proven that age, gender, qualification, social media used for accessing political information do not have significant difference between political participation but the political interest, affiliation and time used in accessing social media for political information have a significant difference between social media online political participation. The findings of the third objective, political efficacy which include both internal and external political efficacy through social media political participation shows that as the respondents' online political engagement increases, their political efficacy also increases. That is as levels of online political participation have significant differences between internal, external and total political efficacy. When correlated political efficacy with demographic variables it is revealed that age, gender, qualification, social media used for accessing political information do not have significant difference between total political efficacy but the political interest, affiliation and time used in accessing social media for political information have a significant difference between total political efficacy. The findings of the fourth objective, real life political activities of respondents have a significant relationship with social media online political participation.

Summary of analysis

Among the group of respondents, 43.01% agree and 15.58% strongly agree that social media act as a vehicle to enhance political information. 46.67% agree that their social media usage for accessing political information provides them an internal political efficacy and 9.95% strongly agree it. Also 43.72% gives a neutral agreement in case of external efficacy and 20.99% strongly agrees and 1.94% strongly agrees it. According to the findings of the study, there is a significant difference in levels of online political participation between internal political efficacy and external political efficacy and total political efficacy. Levels of political participation have significant differences between the respondents' political affiliation, political interest and time spent on social media for accessing political information. Total political efficacy has

significant differences between respondents’ political affiliation, political interest, time spent on social media for accessing political information. According to the findings, levels of online political participation have significant differences between real life political activities.

The findings of the study show that a vast majority (91.5%) agree that social media will become an important tool or strategy in the coming Indian elections. A majority (67%) of respondents believed that social media political participation is needed to sustain the democracy in India in the current political scenario.

	Political participation level	N	Mean Rank	
Internal efficacy	Level 1	39	52.58	Kruskal-Wallis H = 33.58, df = 3, p value = 0.000
	Level 2	66	73.84	
	Level 3	39	95.12	
	Level 4	10	130.15	
	Total	154		
External efficacy	Level 1	39	59.03	Kruskal-Wallis H = 23.885 , df = 3, p value = 0.000
	Level 2	66	71.35	
	Level 3	39	95.59	
	Level 4	10	119.6	
	Total	154		
Total political efficacy	Level 1	39	51.26	Kruskal-Wallis H = 40.481 , df = 3, p value = 0.000
	Level 2	66	71.37	
	Level 3	39	99.81	
	Level 4	10	133.3	
	Total	154		

Table 1: Political efficacy vs Political participation level

Level of political participation	Political Affiliation			Political Interest			Time spent on SM political information					
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Less than 1 hour	1-2 hour	2-3 hour	More than 3 hours	Total	
Level 1	2(5.1)	37(94.9)	39(100)	16(41.0)	23(59.0)	39(100)	30(76.9)	7(17.9)	1(2.6)	1(2.6)	39(100)	
Level 2	9(13.6)	57(86.4)	66(100)	45(68.2)	21(31.8)	66(100)	47(71.2)	17(25.8)	2(3.0)	0(0.0)	66(100)	
Level 3	14(35.9)	25(64.1)	39(100)	35(89.7)	4(10.3)	39(100)	19(48.7)	11(28.2)	6(15.4)	3(7.7)	39(100)	
Level 4	6(60.0)	4(40.0)	10(100)	9(90.0)	1(10.0)	10(100)	2(20.0)	5(50.0)	3(7.7)	1(10.0)	10(100)	
Total	31(20.1)	123(79.9)	154(100)	105(68.2)	49(31.8)	154(100)	98(63.6)	26(39)	11(7.1)	5(3.2)	154(100)	
		Pearson Chi-square=23.108, df=3, P value=.000			Pearson Chi-square=23.809, df=3, P value=.00			Pearson Chi-square=24.007, df=9, P value=.004				

Table 2: Level of Political Participation vs political affiliation, political interest and time spent on social media political information.

	Political Interest	N	Mean Rank	Political Affiliation	N	Mean Rank
Total Political Efficacy	Yes	105	88.64	Yes	31	102.19
	No	49	53.62		123	71.28
Total	154			154		
Mann-Whitney U = 1402.500 p value=0.000				Mann-Whitney U = 1141.000 p value=0.001		

Table 3: Political efficacy vs political affiliation, political interest

	Time Spent on Social Media for Accessing Political Information	N	Mean Rank
Total Political Efficacy	Less than 1 hour	98	70.56
	1- 2 hour	40	84.01
	2- 3 hour	11	109.36
	More than 3 hour	5	91.3
	Total	154	

Table 4: Time spent on social media Political Information and total Political Efficacy

KruskalWallis Test=9.393, df=3, p value=0.025

Social media as an important strategy in coming Indian elections	Frequency (%)
Yes	97(91.5)
No	9(8.5)
Total	154(100)

Table 5: Social media as an important strategy in coming Indian elections

Figures in parenthesis denote percentage

social media political participation is needed to sustain democracy	Frequency (%)
Yes	71(67.0)
No	35(33.0)
Total	154(100)

Table 6: Social media political participation sustain democracy of India

Figures in parenthesis denote percentage

Discussion and conclusion

Conclusively the findings of the study determine that students are active consumers of political information from social media platforms as the majority of the respondents agree that they enhance their political information from social media platforms. Even though students are not active social media political participants it is found out that as their levels of political participation increases as they have interest or affiliation in politics also more time they spent on accessing political information can make them active social media political participants and according to this, their political efficacy increases. Even though the respondents disagree about their social media political participation they believe that social media political participation can sustain the democracy in India and they believe that social media will be one of the significant strategies in future election and decision making. Since the majority believes so, social media political engagement and political participation should increase among both students and youth to be political and also for sustaining the country's democracy. The governing system also should remember that today's youth make tomorrow's future so they should encourage and engage students in politics and related affairs through most engaging social media platforms.

References

Aaker, Jennifer. & Chang, Victoria. (2009, August 27). Obama and the Power of Social Media and Technology. Stanford Business. Retrieved from <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/case-studies/obama-power-social-media-technology>

- Arackal, Francis. (2015). Social Media as a Tool for Political Communication
- Chitlangia, Saloni. (2021, November 9). Influence of social media and technology in the Indian elections. iPleaders. Retrieved from <https://blog.ipleaders.in/influence-of-social-media-and-technology-in-the-indian-elections/>
- DataReportal. (n.d.). Digital 2022: April Global Statshot Report. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-april-global-statshot#:~:text=The%20global%20total%20has%20still,the%20start%20of%20April%202022.>
- Dixon, S. (2022, June 29). Social network users in selected countries in 2022 and 2027. Statista. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278341/number-of-social-network-users-in-selected-countries/>
- D'Souza, Dilip. (2014, January 30). 2014 general election: 150 million young voters?. Mint. Retrieved from <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/Xw5t2GLJiR3NDhuM6nRLDI/2014-general-election-150-million-voter>
- Hamid et al. (2017). Cognitive Engagement and Online Political Participation on Social Media among Youths in Malaysia: The Moderating Role of Political Knowledge. SHS Web of Conferences, 33(5). doi:10.1051/shsconf/20173300085
- JournalsOfIndia. (2022, July 15). Youth in India 2022 report. Retrieved from <https://journalsofindia.com/youth-in-india-2022-report/>
- Kaur & Verma. (2017). Social Media: An Emerging Tool for Political Participation. In Media Influence: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice, (262-265). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Knoll et al. (2018). The social media political participation model: A goal systems theory perspective. Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 26(1), 135–156. doi:10.1177/1354856517750366
- Kemp, Simon. (2022, February 15). Digital 2022: India. DataReportal. Retrieved from <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-india#:~:text=Social%20media%20statistics%20for%20India,in%20India%20in%20January%202022>
- Nayar, Madhav. (2020, February 5). The History of Student Protests in India. The Wire. Retrieved from <https://m.thewire.in/article/politics/the-history-of-student-protests-in-india>
- Nyman, Whitney. & White, David. (2021, October 12). Political Participation. Study. com. Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-political-participation-definition-forms-examples.html>

- Rodrigue, Usha. (2020). Political Communication on Social Media Platforms. In *Platform Capitalism in India* (221-238).
- Rodrigues, Usha. (2020). Political communication on social media platforms and its implications for the public sphere in India. *Platform Capitalism in India*, 161-173. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-44563-8
- Sharma, Vishal. (2012). Young India, Social Networking Sites & Indian Politics. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 73(1), 149-154.
- Statista. (2022, September 20). Worldwide digital population July 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>
- The Economic Times. (2019, May 12). Social media plays key role in influencing first-time voters: Report. Retrieved from https://m.economictimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/social-media-plays-key-role-in-influencing-first-time-voters-report/amp_articleshow/69295605.cms
- Weiss, Julia. (2022). What Is Youth Political Participation? Literature Review on Youth Political Participation and Political Attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2(1). doi:10.3389/fpos.2020.00001
- Yadav, Bhupendar . (2020, June 24). Digital media is redefining modes of political communication and mass contact. *The Indian Express*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/digital-media-twitter-facebook-political-debate-democracy-6472997/lite/>

An analysis of posts by Kerala Police on their Facebook page

Communication & Journalism Research
11 (2) pp 53-61
©The Author (s) 2022
Reprints and Permissions:
masscomhod@uoc. ac. in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

Silpa Mathew*

Research Scholar, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga

Abstract

Wright & Hinson (2009) refers to the noticeable change social media have on communication, particularly on external public relations. Research studies have confirmed the use of social media for public relations by the government machineries too. This study is an analysis of posts in Kerala Police's Facebook page, to understand their usage of the same towards public relations. This quantitative approach towards content analysis subject posts on the Kerala Police's Facebook page in the randomly selected month of September, 2022. A coding sheet developed with reference to previous studies is used to quantify the Facebook posts in to different categories. The study identifies major categories to which their contents fall on and further substantiates significant impact of presentation style and content of the posts on the reactions they receive.

Keywords

Content, Interaction, Facebook page, social media, Kerala police

Introduction

With the world in the midst of social media revolution, it is more than obvious that the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter are the popular communication platforms now (Baruah, 2012). As he argues, the evolution of social media as a communication platform have changed how people communicate, what people think about communication and people's basic characteristics in both interpersonal and social communication.

New media communication seems to be different from classical means of communications in several ways. Sing (2004) observes that the immense opportunity new media provide for social interaction sets it apart from classical media. Unlike the traditional media platforms, new media offers its consumers a chance to be the content creators and the consumers at the same time. Trammell (2006) compares new media to the traditional media and acknowledge that the internet platform facilitates more interactive and two-way communication. Gradually, yet at a steady pace, new media emerged as a mainstream media for information sharing and social interaction across the globe (Narasimhamurthy, 2014).

* Correspondence: shilpamathew93@gmail.com

Social media have become the most cost-effective platforms for all leaders and communicators who upload videos, documents, graphics and photos in order to reach out to the world (Klososky, 2012). That is why probably social media is called as the 'vehicle of the day' for connecting people (Papasolomou and Melanthiou, 2012). Social media tools can build relationships through communication like no other element (Klososky's, 2012). Toledano (2017) is also of same opinion and refers interactivity, co-creation of content, subscription – based information service and third party application development as the highlights of social media.

These references to the popularity and acceptance of social media make it worthy to look into the statistics of social media use. According to the Statistica Portal, Facebook was the most popular social networking site across the world with more than 2.45 billion active users in 2019. According to social media based website NapoleonCat there are 31.71 crore Facebook users in India who constitute a sizeable number (23%) of its entire population. A majority of them are men (76.3%). People aged between 25 and 34 years form the largest user group. This commendable growth is believed to be facilitated by tech giants' investments in India towards nation's technological progress, including Google's Wifi at 400 railway stations, besides the rapid internet growth in rural areas (Mary Meeker report, 2019). As per the report, social media sites have got a huge fan base in Kerala also, with Facebook enjoying the first place. There are 48 lakh active users in Kerala with 71 percent being male users and the rest being female users.

It is in this context that the Kerala Police came up with a Facebook page in 2011, which sooner grew up as the No.1 social media page of any government body. Now, the page is leading this new trend with around 1.8 million followers. Understanding and evaluating their Facebook page is desirable in multiple ways, particularly with regard to public relations.

Review of Literature

There are several studies on and about the topic, analyzing various aspects of public relations practice, the use of new media in public relations and studies on how such online interactive platforms are being used by governments worldwide in public relations practice. Wang (2015) gave a synthesis of social media related public relations research, analyzing several studies and papers incorporating social media in public relations. His findings state that the use of social media as a public relations tool has been there ever since its inception and this trend is still increasing. Quantitative methodology, and content analysis, are the most popular method used in conducting research on social

media. But there is a potential lack in theoretical research and methodological application, Wang says.

Accenture (2014) conducted a comparative study of 10 nations to analyze their new media use in governance. Brazil, Germany, India, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the UK, and the USA were the countries examined under the criteria like a) Citizen Service Delivery, b) Citizen Satisfaction and c) Service Maturity. They surveyed the public and found that 81 percent of them consider it as important to have more digital services from the government and 64 percent of the citizens like to interact with the government through social media. Karakiza (2015) refers to such increasing citizens' demand for easier, hassle-free and seamless interaction with the Government, greater transparency and access to information as a cause, leading government agencies to explore new tools like new digital technology and web 2.0 applications that will ease financial pressure and improve the quality of public services.

O'Connor and Walsh (2018) did a study on the role of social media in policing, by reviewing other studies on the topic. They argue that with its accessibility, ease-of-use, networked and participatory characteristics, social media simplifies the state-society relations. It offers new opportunities for surveillance, risk communication, and impression management if to be specific about policing. Disseminating content and messages to earn public support is much easy now, with the arrival of social media. Beyond that, sharing of important events and matters of concern gradually erodes the boundary between the two.

Das and Babu (2021) conducted a study on the use of Facebook by the district collector of Ernakulam. A content analysis of the posts on the page from 1st January to 31st December 2021 shows a healthy relationship between the administration and the public. They further refer to Facebook as an effective tool to foster democracy as it facilitated interaction between the administrators and public through comments likes and shares. The self-representation and impression management are all about the online presence of the user. Similar to other social network sites, Facebook also offers a chance to create a personal profile, a user's personal identity in the cyberspace (Boyd and Hargittai, 2010).

Methodology

The researcher conducted a quantitative content analysis of the posts on Kerala Police's Facebook page for a month of time. September got randomly elected and 60 posts from 1st September to 30th September were analyzed using coding sheet and SPSS. Each post were analyzed and coded based on the nature of

content, language used, mode of presentation, and the level of interaction etc. Message, attachment, title, hash tags and all such elements of the Facebook posts were analyzed towards this coding. Communications in the form of like, comment and share were counted to measure the interaction.

Objectives

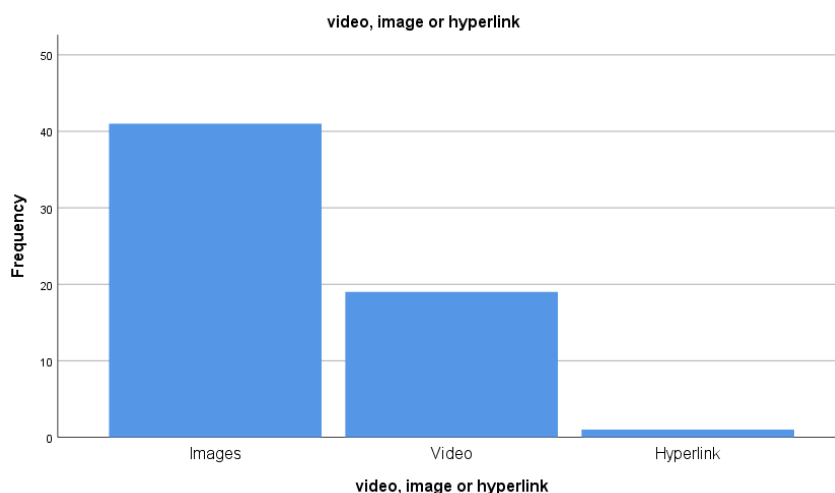
The objective of this study is to analyze the posts in Kerala police's Facebook page and to identify its major characteristics.

Data Analysis & Discussion

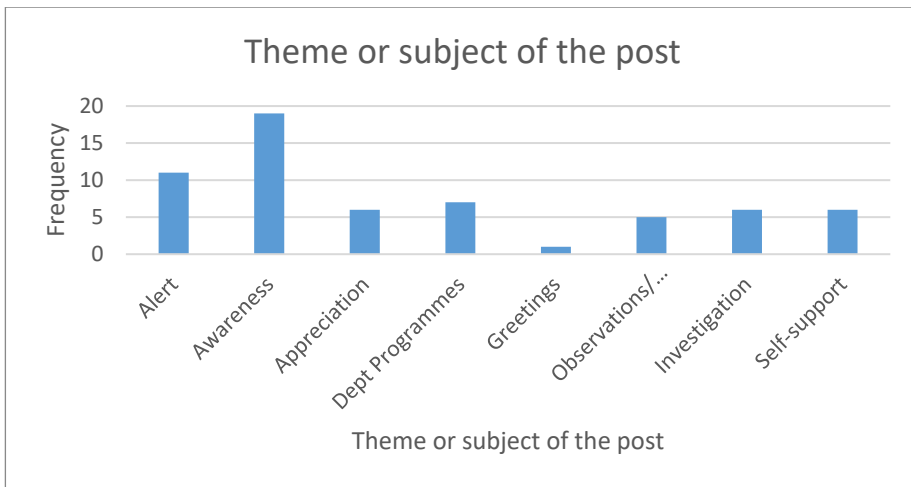
A total 61 posts from 1st September 2022 to 30th September 2020 was analyzed for its frequency, characteristics and results. The quantitative data collected using the coding sheet was fed to SPSS to get its statistical representation. A simple percentage analysis is done in order to understand the frequency distribution.

Nature of Posts by the Kerala Police Department

The Facebook page of Kerala Police posts an average of two posts a day, making it a count of 61 for the month of September alone. Among the 61 posts, 41 posts, that is 67.2% consists of images. This majority include all types of representation, either as posters or even meme, but all in image format. Only 31.1% Percentage of the posts feature video contents, which are not even the half of the images they have on their page. The page rarely features any hyperlinks, which is only 1.6% for the month of September, 2022.



Among the 61 posts, alerts and awareness are identified as the most recurring themes of the posts. Half the posts appeared in the month of September, which is 49.2% of the posts, belongs to these two categories together. There are posts meant to alert the public against online spams and frauds and there are posts aiming to create awareness on such hoax, traffic rules, individual rights, law and order etc. The other 49.8% of the posts belongs to various identified categories which includes department programs, greetings, observations, self support, appreciation and investigation updates. Anyhow, most of the post turned out to be informative in one way or another.



Interaction between the Public and the Police through the Facebook Page

The researcher cross-tabled theme of the post with public’s attitude in seeking information from the department. 90.9% of the alert posts and 63.15% of the awareness posts carry questions and queries from the public. But the public seems less interested to seek information regarding department programs, investigation updates and posts on observations, celebrations and self-supporting posts from the police department. But altogether, 52.45% of the posts got some sort of enquiries in its comment section.

		Count		Total
		Seeking Information	Not seeking information	
Theme or subject of the post	Alert	10	1	11
	Awareness	12	7	19
	Appreciation	3	3	6
	Dept Programmes	2	5	7
	Greetings	0	1	1
	Observations/ Celebrations	1	4	5
	Investigation	2	4	6
	Self-support	2	4	6
Total		32	29	61

Theme or subject of the post * Whether they are seeking information or not Crosstabulation

If to measure the interaction between the police department and the public in terms of likes, shares and comments; alert and awareness themed posts got the highest number of interactions. This is followed by posts on investigations and appreciation and interaction is the lowest for department programmes like CoCon and Hackethon.

Both images and videos get equal response from the audience when the format in which the posts were made is crossed with the grand total of the interaction measured, in terms of likes, comments and shares. And the response to a hyperlink they shared is commendably low, with the lowest number of like, share and comment among the entire posts.

	Count							Total
	Grand total of interactions through like, share and comment							
	0-999	1000-4999	5000-9999	10000-14999	15000-19999	20000-24999	& above	
Images	2	14	8	11	1	2	3	41
Video	0	11	2	1	2	2	1	19
Hyperlink	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	2	25	11	12	3	4	4	61

Video, image or hyperlink * Grand total of interactions through like, share and comment
Crosstabulation

Findings and Conclusion

Kerala Police's Facebook page and the reactions in it refer to the possibility of police-public interaction beyond one way communication. 52.45% of the posts got some sort of enquiries in its comment section, which means people consider Kerala Police's Facebook page as a platform to seek information. These numbers of the comments and its contents also show people interaction and participation in government activities. It elaborates the healthy relationship between the government and the citizens. Thus social media proves to be a good tool of democracy in this information era.

While considering the presentation of the post, public seems to opt for images or videos rather than hypertexts or hash tags, and the police media cell is serving them accordingly. The public casts more reactions on posts carrying some images. Though the public, in varying fraction, react to every post the Kerala Police posts on their Facebook page, they are more lenient towards posts raising alerts and awareness among the citizens.

The police social media cell seems to be easy on applying any particular strategy, but posts having emotional appeal have performed well in gaining popularity. That is evident in the reactions public shower on posts showing some positive social interventions their department or a department person does, apart from the duty of law enforcement they are bestowed with. Another factor they rely on for better reach is the comical representations, memes and trolls, which rather get viewed and shared widely among their followers in Facebook.

98.36% of the posts in the official social media account are created by the Kerala Police's social media cell. They are consistent in using the hash tag #keralapolice and a few relevant hash tags too, though not always. The social media cell is particularly conscious and careful about using Malayalam – the local language in every post they make. A specialized social media cell working for the maintenance of the page seems to be effective, as no posts they create leave uncounted or neglected by the followers. So, the page is yielding a positive attitude from the public, establishing better public relations practice and a goodwill among the public. Besides, the use of social media for policing keeps it in pace with the rest of the world, making the department data-driven, and intelligence- led and technologically mediated.

Scope & Limitations of the Study

The study gives an understanding about Kerala Police's use of Facebook page for different purposes. And it analyses police- public interaction through the media. But it would yielded a more inclusive and accurate analysis if public's

part were also analyzed. A survey among the public to understand their attitude could have done in this aspect. Also, the page and its performance were analyzed based only on a month's post, which considerably is a short period. A study posts in six months or a year could have done to get accurate results. Further, Kerala Police's interaction with the public includes other social media platforms too, like Instagram, and accommodating such recently trending social media platforms for the analysis seems to be the need of the hour.

A detailed study encompassing the above concerns too would have made the research an inclusive one, which may even lead to developing a working model for government bodies public relations through social media.

References

- Accenture. (2014). Digital Government Pathways to Delivering Public Services for the Future: A comparative study of digital government performance across 10 countries. Retrieved from http://nstore.accenture.com/acn_com/Accenture-Digital-Government-Pathways-to-Delivering-PublicServices-for-the-Future.pdf
- Baruah, T. D. (2012). Effectiveness of Social Media as a Tool of Communication and its Potential for Technology Enabled Connections: A Micro Level Study. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2(5).
- Boyd, D. M., & Hargittai, E. 2010. Facebook Privacy Setting: Who cares? *First Monday*, 5(8).
- Das, A & Babu, S. D. (2021) Social Media and its influence on public administration and communication: An analysis of Facebook page activities of Ernakulam Collector during Covid 19 pandemic. <http://annalsofrscb.ro>
- Karakiza, M. (2015). Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences. *ScienceDirect*. 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.1214
- Klososky, S. (2012). Social Technology: The next frontier. *Financial Executive*, 28(4), 40-45.
- Meeker, M. (2019). Internet Trends 2019. Retrieved from https://www.bondcap.com/pdf/Internet_Trends_2019.pdf
- Narasimhamurthy, N. (2014). New Media and New Culture: The Dependency of Indian Online Community. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(10), 42-49.
- Papasolomou, I., & Melanthiou, Y. (2012). Social media: Marketing public relations' new best friend. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 18(3), 319-328. doi:10.1080/10496491.2012.696458
- Sing, A. (2019). *Mass Communications Theory*. Jaipur: ABD Publishers
- Toledano, M. (2017). Dialogue, strategic communication, and ethical public relations: Lessons from Martin Buber's political activism. *Public Relations Review*, 44(1), 131-141.

- Trammell, K. D. (2006). Blog offensive: An exploratory analysis of attacks published on campaign blog posts from a political public relations perspective. *Public Relations Review*, 32(4), 402-406.
- Wang, Y. (2015). Incorporating Social Media in Public Relations: A Synthesis of Social Media Related Public Relations Research. *Public Relations Journal*, 9(3)
- Wright, D. & Hinson, M. (2009). Examining How Public Relations Practitioners Actually Are Using Social Media. *Public Relations Journal Public Relations Society of America*, 3.

Communication and Journalism Research

VOLUME 11 ISSUE 2 JULY - DECEMBER 2022

Communication and Journalism Research (CJR) is a refereed journal published twice a year by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Calicut, Kerala, India. The journal presents broad ranging account of the fast changing world of communication, bringing together a variety of studies in qualitative and quantitative approaches.



Peer Reviewed Research Journal

COMMUNICATION & JOURNALISM RESEARCH

VOLUME 11 ISSUE 2 JULY - DECEMBER 2022

DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
KERALA, INDIA