

Digital Media *Habitus*, Agency and Structure: Convergence Practices Among Journalists in Indian Newspapers

Communication & Journalism Research
4 (1&2) p 137 - 150
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masscomhod@uoc.ac.in
ISSN 2348 – 5663

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Abstract

The field of journalism is being restructured with the adoption of interactive and multimedia technologies. Convergence process has amended the 'rules of access' and 'rules of the game' for journalists. The new accession rules may include multiskilling, multitasking, multimedia storytelling, knowledge of different apps and tools, critical thinking, coding and designing, adaptability to new environment, social and cultural phenomena and many more. The adoption of technologies results in the journalist gaining symbolic capital or internal recognition. This creates an environment for appropriating professional capital or external recognition in terms of promotion and increment. This paper analysed assimilation of convergence practices into the media field by journalists, changes in journalistic values, changes in *doxa* of the field and agent's *habitus* through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. The thematic analysis of the data reveals that journalists appropriate new technologies to redefine the *habitus* and adapt to the contemporary dominant work practices.

Keywords

Media convergence, journalistic practices, *doxa*, *habitus*, symbolic and professional capital, structure, agency

Introduction

We are living at the cusp of technological shifts, communication infrastructure and profound continual changes intersecting with the production and consumption of content by media that are as diverse as cultural plurality. What we witness is the

media convergence across industries, commerce, culture, content, and the experience of reading. Jenkins (2006) defines convergence as:

..... the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2)

Ithiel de Sola Pool has been hailed as the Prophet of Convergence by Henry Jenkins (2006). Pool called the process of convergence as ‘convergence of modes’ which is blurring the lines between different media (as cited by Jenkins, 2006, p. 10). Nicholas Negroponte’s model of convergence (1980) which is made of three rings - publishing, broadcasting and computing – predicts that these rings would start overlapping and eventually it would become one (as cited by Dubberly, 2011). Newsroom integration, multimedia and interactive nature of the content, formation of community among readers with the help of social media technologies, readers’ multitasking behaviours, integration of newspaper with internet are some of the key properties that can be attributed to media convergence. Deuze (2004) states that convergence, cross-ownership and multimedia newsrooms are becoming an integral part of modern journalism. Dwyer (2010) explains media convergence as a process whereby new information and communication technologies are adapted by communication industry and culture.

While discussing about the Indian media, one has to take account of the robust status of print media and the relatively low reach of internet (Mishra, 2014). In this sense, Indian media scenario, especially print media, is slightly different from many other countries where the future of print media is said to be bleak. Indian media organizations have started experimenting with various forms of convergence with varying degrees in small and large organisations (Mishra, 2014).

This paper attempts to analyse assimilation of convergence practices into the media field, changes in journalistic values, changes in *doxa* of the field and agent’s *habitus* and the relationship between agent and structure through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory. The research questions of this study are:

RQ1. How convergence practices are assimilated into the media field?

RQ2. How does the assimilation bring about changes in the *doxa* and the *habitus*?

Bourdieu’s *habitus*, field and capital

Society is known as social room and this room is divided into many fields. Every field has certain ‘rules of the game’ (*doxa*). Members of the field have to follow the rules. There are several positions or better positions in field for which members abide by the *doxa* and other implicit rules (Engelby, n.d.). ‘Rule of access’ allows agents to enter the field after which they have to struggle for getting better positions.

Agents' capitals - economic, social and cultural – contribute a lot in getting better positions.

A field is defined as 'network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, as cited by Tsui & Lee, 2012). It can be said that field is made of many positions which accompany different career path. There are certain rules which are to be adhered to by an agent. Agents need to acquire certain social and political capital to move on to a career path (Tsui & Lee, 2012).

An agent may not be fully acquainted with the practices of the field, but she/he works with some tacit understanding and the directions given by the stylebook or seniors. This practical understanding of working in a particular field is known as agents' *habitus* (Engelby, n.d.). Bourdieu defines *habitus* as "A structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" (Bourdieu, 1984, p.170, as cited by Hawthorn, n.d.). Agent's *habitus* helps gain symbolic and career capital.

Symbolic capital is defined as internal recognition while career capital as external recognition. Though agents adhere to *doxa*, field is also reconfigured by the *habitus* of agents. Therefore, it is not the structure that always affects journalists rather agents also affect fields. There are spaces of possibilities of change and amendment (Engelby, n.d.).

Review of literature

Pavlik (2000) states that changing technologies exert great influence on journalism in at least four ways- the way journalists do their jobs, the nature of news content being shaped by the technology, the organization of the newsroom and industry being restructured and the relationship between media organizations and their publics. The potential of new media is not Convergence but Connection- the best use of convergence will lead to meaningful connection and interaction with reader/user community (Pavlik, 2004). Dailey, Demo and Spillman (2005) offer a model of convergence continuum as a conceptual framework to study collaboration among journalists, editors, managers and web editors in newsrooms – cross-promotion, cloning, competition, content sharing and full convergence. Lawson-Borders (2005) proposes that convergence is an on-going, adjusting and adapting processes that try to meet the contours of an organization which means, convergence is not universal paradigm rather every media organization and market has their own version of convergence.

Quinn (2005) defines convergence as multiple platform publishing. Convergence serves the business model by reaching to more audiences via different delivery platforms along with editorial model where convergence provides an

opportunity to journalists to explore new medium and techniques for better storytelling (Quinn, 2005). Since the future of journalism will be more dependent on data and information and journalists will have to turn information into valuable knowledge for their audiences, they must be provided with training programmes in order to discharge their responsibilities in the forthcoming days (Quinn, 2005). Though journalism has the twin aim of telling the truth and making money, the holy grail of journalism remains a perfect story that is shared, tagged, tweeted about, and bookmarked (Quinn, 2005). Journalist should not shovel content from one medium to another rather they must tailor the story to suit each platform and the audience as well (Quinn, 2005). Internet has become integral part of journalist's toolbox- be it accessing various online documents and reports or gathering information (O'Sullivan and Heinonen, 2008).

Robinson (2011) finds that the employment of new digital tool has transformed physical landscape of news-gathering, reporting, editing, relationship and the culture of newsroom resulting into new work routines and the newsroom changing into 'web-centric'. Tsui and Lee (2012) study gender inequality in the field of journalism in Hong Kong through the lens of Bourdieu's field theory. Authors find that though female journalists are under-represented in the upper rungs of the organization and family tension forces many female journalists to quit their jobs at different stages in the field yet many other female journalists tackle the situation aptly despite the structural inequalities coupled with family problems (Tsui and Lee, 2012). Wallace (2013) studies multi skilling aspect of media convergence at three BBC regional newsrooms and finds that many journalists perceive multi skilling as a means to raise the journalistic standards while other journalists report that multi skilling involves cost implications not only in monetary terms but quality output and journalists' welfare also. Desire, motivation, ability, training and practice are identified as the determinants of multi skilling (Wallace, 2013).

Verweij (2009) conducts a case study of two newspapers and convergence project at the Rhodes University to understand how transformations are being brought about by convergence. The author concludes that the convergence process is being mediated by the organizational and structural factors. He identifies several lessons from convergence project- there is a need of central database for content management, priority to pre-purposing, training of journalist and proper communication about others' work and specialization. Convergence is just another dimension to journalism with the possibilities for better journalism wherein journalists get several ways and tools to tell the story in better way and users are better informed (Verweij, 2009). Dupagne and Garrison (2006) suggest that students, aspiring for a good career in media today, must have proficiency in writing and reporting effectively regardless of platform, web-designing and presentation skills, good communication skills, adaptability to new environment and reduction of medium-specific loyalty.

Methodology

In order to understand the phenomenon of convergent practices assimilated into the newsroom by journalists, in-depth interviews were conducted. Six journalists from two newspapers were interviewed face-to-face on 31st October, 2014 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Three journalists from *Dainik Bhaskar* and three from *Hindustan Times*, who volunteered to participate in the interview, were selected as respondents for the study. *Dainik Bhaskar* is the Hindi language daily which is the second largest circulated newspaper in Hindi (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2013). *Dainik Bhaskar* is published by the *Dainik Bhaskar Group* which publishes newspapers in 4 languages in 67 editions in 14 states of the country (Bhaskar News, 2014). Recently *Dainik Bhaskar* launched its digital edition for Uttar Pradesh. The *Hindustan Times* is the English language daily newspaper which is the third largest circulated newspaper in English (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2013).

The respondents include sub-editor, reporter/deputy bureau chief, principal correspondent, copy-editor, editor and editorial head. In-depth interviews were conducted with the journalists and the interviews were audio recorded with their prior consent. The audio-recording was transcribed during 15-17 January, 2015 and subsequently a thematic coding was carried out. The names of journalists were replaced with code words to maintain anonymity of the respondents.

The researchers conducted thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews. Data was coded as per the three stages of thematic analysis (King and Horrocks, 2010). In the first stage, that is descriptive coding, the transcription was read thoroughly and important points were marked. Descriptive code was given to key points. Each descriptive code was explained with short comment. This process was repeated for all the rest transcripts. At the second stage, which is of interpretative coding, descriptive codes were grouped together based on their similar characteristics. In the third stage overarching themes were identified.

Analysis

Skills and literacy as ‘cultural capital’ and ‘rules of accesses’

The data analysed revealed about the perception of journalists (respondents) on the skill sets new entrants into the field must possess. A journalist aspirant needs to hold a degree/diploma/certificate in mass communication and journalism or related areas. Though formal education appears to be a passport to the field of journalism, industry lays emphasis on fundamental skills and capabilities that can be applied at workplace. Secondly, journalists should have good command over language sufficient enough to write with minimum grammatical mistakes. Writing as a creative effort must be accompanied by typing proficiency. Merely knowing one language seems to be insufficient for excelling in the field of journalism; rather a journalist ought to know English as an additional language. Knowledge of second language would help him/her translate from one language to another and *vice versa* and moreover he/she can update himself/herself with new happenings. The practices in the professional are marked by good command over language, good

communication skills, good writing skills that include use of common words, simple sentences and flow in copy.

The *habitus* the journalist is inflected by the emergence of new technologies in newsroom and outside. Computer, internet, mobile phone, social networking sites, messaging apps and other technologies are adding new dimensions to journalism. In the wake of technologies being integral part of journalism, a journalist is expected to incorporate technologies into his professional practices, be tech-friendly and proficient in using computer and smart phones. A copy editor at *Hindustan Times* tells about the prerequisite for a journalist:

The basic prerequisite for a journalist was and is good command over language. That had not changed. Second thing that you need is you have to be able to know how to use computer and mobile phone properly. These are two basic prerequisites that you need- command over language and computer proficiency [sic].

Almost all newspapers conduct a recruitment test for aspiring journalists to test their language and computer proficiency in addition to formal education.

Thus it can be concluded that a formal degree in the field of journalism and mass communication and good command over language and computer proficiency are the basic 'rules of access' for the field of journalism. These skill-sets also contribute to the cultural capital which help a journalists get a better position.

Adapting to new *habitus* and *doxa*

Knowledge of core subjects, general knowledge and other technical stuff should be complemented with adaptability to work with pressing deadlines and openness to new working environment. Now even a newspaper journalist is required to break the news like television reporters. The journalistic practices are changing with the changes in the social practices of readers who access content through mobile phones at frequent intervals in a day. The implicit requirement is the need for filing news reports fast to meet the demands of readers. The journalistic field and the social and professional capital (symbolic capital) journalists have to acquire in terms of sharing the news with readers backed by their literacy and proficiency to use technologies are in a state of flux. The struggle between the professional field and social field is constantly negotiated by journalists. Almost all newspapers have their website and social media pages, so journalists must learn to break the news on wire. They should be able to combine the medium specific affordances of newspaper, television and the digital platform. Editor of *Dainik Bhaskar*, digital edition, Lucknow says:

In this digital world, there exists a new phenomenon. Websites of the newspapers are providing the promptness of TV in breaking the news story and the depth of the newspaper. The digital edition of *Dainik Bhaskar* promotes swiftness in breaking the news.

It says- *kalki news aaj* (Tomorrow's news today). I changed it in this way- *Aajnahiabhi* (Not today rather now). We are faster than news channels. I not only break the news, give all the details, background and analyses also. I provide video also.

Whether it is a new technology or new work culture, journalists should be flexible enough to mould themselves and work proactively. It is immediacy as well as presenting up-to-date information, adaptability to new technologies and related social practices that become the 'rules of the game' (*doxa*) of the digital media newsrooms. Agents' (journalists) *habitus* (practical sense of operating in a field) gets refined with the adherence to the *doxa* of the field.

Attracting and retaining readers' attention

Attracting and retaining readers' attention is one of the biggest challenges which newspapers have to confront with. Journalists, who wish to excel in the field, will have to learn using appropriate headlines, photos and keywords. They should not forget to maintain flow in their writing failing which readers can go to some other newspapers or news portals. Newspaper journalists will have to be expert in search engine optimisation (SEO) and they must learn how to write headlines leveraging SEO techniques. As storytellers, they should learn how to increase the visibility of their stories by way of using certain keywords which will help in indexing stories by search engines promptly. A sub-editor from *Dainik Bhaskar*, digital edition, Lucknow, highlights the importance of readers' attention in this digital era:

...here the game is of page-views (PV) and unique visitors (UV). How many people have viewed your page and how many new visitors are there for your story? ... Headline and photo should be appropriated in order to draw traffic on the page. It will be helpful in drawing new visitors as well. Second thing, there should be flow in your copy, keywords should be proper. Readers do not have much time to spend on news story, so there should be a flow in the story. Readers should not get bored.

Moreover, he says, journalists should focus on distinguishing their stories from their counterparts in other organisations. They should try to build good social and political connections. It will help journalists get exclusive stories and new insights on different events.

From the sub-editor's point of view, it could be understood that meeting people and developing rapport with people is essential. As part of the journalistic career, traditional rules are not abandoned. However, these skills need to be interwoven with new set of rules such as using technologies to tell stories differently. The *habitus* thus constituted is formed out of the media organisation's expectations and demands in combination with how journalists meet these demands using their creative media literacy (using technologies to share and present news). The fields are populated with several actors – journalists, management, readers,

people journalists meet and also technologies (Latour, 2005). The intersection of these social actors gives rise to the professional capital that journalists acquire.

Passion as cultural and professional capital

If a journalist performs better, he/she can go ahead of others. One journalist tells that there are some senior journalists who take more time than their juniors in the process of getting promotions. A journalist will have to be passionate and dedicated towards his/her work, only then he/she can excel. Excellence should not be restricted to core journalistic skills (writing, editing, designing, etc.) rather one should learn managerial skills also. A multitasking journalist (handle news stories, distribution strategies in the internet and mobile), can lead the whole team. The editor, *Dainik Bhaskar*, digital edition, Lucknow tells the importance of being passionate towards work:

If you want to excel in your field, you have to make your own rules. We should have dedication and passion towards our work. Passion is the keyword. If you are not passionate about your work you can never do well in your life.

Passion is a field specific to any profession in that it inheres in an embodied creative self. The by-products of passion include generating news stories, distributing them through internet and mobile phones and thereby getting more readers for the news organisation. Passion implicitly requires journalists to multitask so that they can endow oneself with the 'professional capital' that conditions the social practices of a journalist. Passion and dedication towards work also constitute the cultural capital.

Journalistic capital: Independent of social standing

Likewise other fields, the field of journalism has also the hierarchy of designations/posts which are given to journalists based on their expertise, hard work, excellence and experience. These designations are promotions or professional capital acquired due to journalist's relentless pursuit of highest standards in career, and experience. However designations are not in itself the bearer of professional capital. A journalist generating good stories with regular frequency is likely to be remembered and respected by others. Professional capital is not linked to promotion and the financial benefits but to the hardworking nature of journalists. In other words, professional capital is not contingent on economic capital but on the cultural capital. High impact factor news stories are more talked about than the big designation. The cultural capital or the professional capital is closely linked to the social capital or contacts journalists have with different sources. The copy editor of the *Hindustan Times* says:

... There are couple of things that people look for- the brand name that you carry with you. If you work in certain newspapers, you will be given more weightage than others. Second thing is the

contacts and the story that you do. If you have done stories which have high impact factor or which have led other newspapers to do the same story or follow-ups, you will have more respect. When it comes to newsroom level, your respect is purely performance based. Performance in the sense how many exclusive stories have you done! If you are at desk how good you are in making headlines, how the copy can be best-edited, are you able to pick the news from a bunch of news stories.

Professional practices as *habitus*

Journalists agree that sometimes they collaborate with their seniors on many aspects of the story – such as news angle, or headline or design or photo selection – but they try to avoid having fierce argument with their seniors. They seem to be following the written or tacit guidelines of the organizations. Their *habitus* therefore is more conditioned by work place ethics and guidelines than by spontaneous actions. Senior journalists enjoy the freedom to experiment with newsroom working culture. Bourdieu's field is in a state of flux here with younger journalists motivated to learn and embody practices that senior journalists are practising. The horizon of the *habitus* expands for the younger journalists to incorporate new practices that are contingent on 'social capital' within newsrooms. The *habitus* is a combination of unique way of performing their duties and adhering to social practices within newsrooms. The editor of *Dainik Bhaskar*, digital edition, Lucknow has changed the work culture by setting the motto of his organization- from 'tomorrow's news today' to 'not today rather now'. He motivates the younger journalists to exercise their creative and spontaneous ideas and thoughts in the workplace. He says:

Most often we get awards from the top for successfully handling the website. As a team leader I get the award but my team does not sense the feeling of receiving any award. I share my award with my team. For instance if I get Rs. 15, 000, I purchase shield and other certificates and distribute it among my team members. The team gets encouraged. I can throw a party as well. This is only for motivating my team to excel. By the way of giving award at small level, we try to make their efforts visible to other team-members.

Social networking sites and messaging apps in journalism

One of the editors interviewed is of the view that Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp are the most talked about social networking sites and messaging app. Twitter is proving to be game-changer in the field of journalism as far as news dissemination and getting new story ideas are concerned. They realise that news stories are circulated and re-circulated when they are shared on Facebook and Twitter. Journalists view Twitter as purely professional medium which helps them in doing their work in a professional way. Though Facebook was held as personal medium, it was considered as the best medium for a journalist for soliciting feedback. Another journalist tells that Facebook helps him get updated with news and events.

Journalists agree that Facebook and Twitter are providing added information to them. Moreover they can make good connections via these media.

WhatsApp is growing as an important journalistic tool for the generation of news stories on the other hand. The editor, *Dainik Bhaskar*, digital edition, Lucknow tells that his whole organization runs on WhatsApp:

We have made a group and all journalists are added in this group...They file their stories from the field itself through WhatsApp. They not only send the text but photo and video as well. WhatsApp has become a very effective tool to report from the field. I also keep on updating my journalists about various components of the story... they keep on sending the details and here we keep on updating the story on the website.

Journalists navigate through the use and potential of social media tools in their profession which constitutes a field or fields. Fields are shaped and governed by *habitus* that journalists are in. The professional capital is part of symbolic capital – capital that journalists acquire by way of using the technologies and that endow them with a social and professional standing in newsroom. The *habitus* not only encompasses producers but also readers who consume and co-produce content. The *habitus* is thus filled with both producers and consumers who compete for attention through their knowledge about the social world. However, from the interviews, it could be argued that *habitus* is viewed strictly from the producers point of view. Contacts built via Facebook and WhatsApp shape the social capital of journalists which helps them get their work done.

Openness to new technologies

Journalists agree that they should be open and warm up to new technologies and learn tools and technologies in the field of journalism. Editorial head of the *Dainik Bhaskar* tells that WhatsApp was unknown to him but when it became necessary for the work, he learnt it. Moreover, newspaper organizations provide training programmes when a new technology comes into practice. The copy editor of the *Hindustan Times* tells that he was provided with a training programme on how to use Adobe InDesign for designing newspaper pages replacing QuarkXPress.

Learning new technologies is a matter of survival also. The *habitus* of journalism and the multiple fields that inhabit it ranges from professionalism, inclination towards technological adoption, to ‘ontological security’ and several stakeholders are involved in it. If one does not embrace it, he/she would lag behind and be defeated by their colleagues and competitors. One journalist suggests that there is no age for learning - journalists will have to keep on learning new technologies, new social practices and ideologies.

Recognition as symbolic capital

The field is not minimalistic confining itself only to newsroom but includes spaces outside. A journalist engages with all spaces. The field is offline and online, includes journalists and readers, management and profit etc. Those who navigate through all spaces will get due recognition from the spaces. Awards are symbolic capital stemming from the social and cultural capital. These rewards distinguish them from others and motivate them to excel. Sports correspondent, the *Hindustan Times*, Lucknow tells how he is valued on account of his work:

Now we have a system that while filing, your copy will carry your name and email address. When a person likes your story, he/she will give response through your mail. People from my organization and from other organizations along with readers give response to me. Colleagues will appreciate you for writing good story. Even journalists from rival newspapers also send encouraging response.

Discussion

The ‘rules of access’ for the field of journalism have of course changed a lot with the coming of new technologies, tools, apps and social networking sites. A journalist is supposed to be proficient in using computer, internet and mobile phones. Newspaper journalists can’t afford to work the way they used to work earlier rather they are expected to break the new story every now and then. They have to disseminate it on various social media platforms. They have to be quite comfortable in dealing with text, photo, video and graphic. They have to learn and use WhatsApp for professional purpose. Other rules include some formal degree in the field of journalism, good command over language, computer and mobile phone proficiency among others.

Once journalist enters the field of journalism, there are certain ‘rules of the game’ (*doxa*) which are to be followed if he/she wants to move ahead on the career path. The nature of deadlines has changed a lot in the digital era. Every now and then, journalists are filing their stories. Journalists will have to lean to work under pressure with pressing deadlines. They have to be expert in handling search engine optimisation (SEO) along with writing good copy. If journalists want to excel and progress, they have to be very dedicated and passionate towards their work. Journalists’ *habitus* makes them adaptive to the new work culture. Gradually they start recognising the subtleties of the designations and internal mechanism of the organization. Some rules and guidelines are learnt by them from rulebook while many practical things are learnt from their seniors and work cultural of the newsroom.

Good social and political connections, social media profile such as Facebook and Twitter, use of messaging app WhatsApp and huge friend list contribute to building social capital along with their ‘journalistic capital’. Journalists make good social connection which helps them get the story ideas and news stories far ahead. Social capital proves to be helpful in getting better position. Journalists try hard to accumulate more cultural capital, that is, knowledge of

technical and practical things. They do attend workshops and training sessions for enhancing their skills required for doing better journalism. By the way of cultural capital, they manage to distinguish themselves from others.

If journalists perform better in their field, they would get respect. One journalist tells that he received many encouraging emails from readers, colleagues and even colleagues from rival newspapers. Encouraging email can be termed as symbolic capital or internal recognition. Often, symbolic capital leads to career capital or external recognition. Getting three fellowships to learn to work on three different beats by the interviewed journalist is a kind of external recognition. Best performance award and journalist of the month are meant for recognizing hard-working and better performing journalists externally.

Acknowledgement

The researchers express their gratitude to Mr. Ankit Kumar Singh and Mr. Raghuvendra Mishra who helped in collecting the data.

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