

Newspaper Media Libraries: Journalists and their Information Seeking Behaviour

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Abstract

The advancement in ICT and media convergence are redefining the scope of journalism education (ACRL, 2011). The span of journalism covers content published via newspapers and magazines (print as well as e editions), television and radio (broadcast including web versions), websites and applications. The present research attempted to study the information seeking behaviour of journalists in Maharashtra. A structured questionnaire developed using Google forms were used for data collection. The response rate was 12.4%. It was observed that 25(83.3%) respondents used Internet for information seeking. Followed by various reports related to incidents that they covered 23(76.7%) and persons who were present at the incidents 21(70%). Verbal communication with colleagues 15(50%) were found to be useful to them for information seeking. It was found that nearly half of the respondents visit their newspaper library as per their need of information. The study presents a clear picture of information seeking behaviour of working journalists.

Keywords: Information seeking behavior; India, Journalist, Media Libraries, Newspaper Libraries

1. Introduction

Journalism covers content published via newspapers and magazines (print as well as e-editions), television and radio (broadcast including web versions), websites and applications. Even today, the news media is the chief source of information and opinion about public affairs, covering current national and international events.

Mass media have undergone extensive changes over the last two decades with the advent of digital technology and publication of news on the Internet simultaneously with print editions. This has created a shift in the consumption of print media, as people increasingly consume news through e-readers, smart phones, and other electronic devices, challenging news organizations ("Journalism, n.d.").

Journalist reports the events that impact our lives. Each journalistic form and style uses different techniques of data collection and reporting according to their story

types, specialization/interest and their audiences. There are five principal types of journalists: investigative, news, reviews, columns and feature writing, and photojournalist.

2. Journalists' Information Need and their Information Seeking Behavior

Newspaper journalists require various types of information it may be evidence, eye witnesses, documents, etc. for various purposes. The information seeking behavior and needs vary among different types of journalists. According to Singh and Sharma (2013) the working journalists who deal with news and views use different strategy in seeking and searching information from libraries which may vary from other types of journalists. Every day journalists use a wide range of sources of information in their day-to-

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day work Journalists, by the nature of their profession, are information gatherers (Chinn, 2000). Journalists have five purposes in seeking information: fact-checking, current awareness, research, context, and stimulus.

3. Role of Libraries and Librarians in Media Industry

Ansari and Zuberi, (n.d.) labeled media as an information hungry industry. It stands on the pillars of information. Practitioners working in media industry need current, authoritative and factual information to construct the news. For fulfillment of these needs, media practitioners (MPs) consult many sources and channels of information, such as libraries, information centers, record centers, government/corporate offices, and the Internet. The Internet and online services provide tremendous amount of information but an in-house media library can be easily accessed and provides authentic information. A media library can provide personalized information services such as Current Awareness Service (CAS), Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), and other reference services. Media libraries provide wide range of services to the editorial department. There is a need to identify the requirement of MPs because they play various roles right from information users, information producers to information communicators (Ansari & Zuberi, n.d.). Working journalists often make news on current happenings and write feature articles, contribute editorials, or report an event with its historical background/evidences to a newspaper. The library is the path that reporters and editors usually take as they conceptualize, develop, write and edit the day's news. The information which a journalist obtains from the library is used mainly for writing feature articles, news items and for editing news items. The journalist gives more importance to primary sources of information than to other sources and primary sources are mostly found in libraries and they are more authentic (Mahapatra & Panda, 2001).

Thus, the role of media librarians is crucial. They literally work as information gatekeepers and based on the information needs of journalists, they select authentic sources-print and/or digital-and deliver accurate information. Media librarians are also required to maintain newspaper archives, newspaper clippings and provide CAS, SDI services.

The present research is an attempt to study the information seeking behaviour of journalists.

4. Review of Literature

Attfield and Dowell (2002) conducted a study about information seeking and use of British journalists. The study summarized journalists' information seeking as motivated by originality/authenticity checking, developing a personal understanding, discovering/confirming potential content and information gathering and managing multiple information spaces. They described work activity in the context of a series of behaviour shaping constraints and cognitive and external resources. In a case study of Information seeking and searching behaviour of working journalists in Orissa state, Mahapatra and Panda (2001) describing the pattern of journalists' information behaviour-searching and locating information sources and services, mode of communication and strategy employed in seeking needed information, their preference for information sources, and problems faced by them in locating information.

Singh and Sharma, (2013), found that needs of journalists vary and journalists use various information sources such as dictionaries, biographical dictionaries, journals, news magazines, newspapers, newspaper clipping files, etc. The main hurdles faced was lack of modern communication gadgets, information scattered in many sources, lack of time to look for or read information, information not readily available and inadequate library services and sources, especially ready reference sources useful for journalists, are rarely published.

Wien (2000) suggested that a course on online information retrieval needs to be designed specifically for students of journalism, as the information needs of journalists varies from the information needs of academicians and researchers in sciences and social sciences.

Campbell (1997) investigated the ways in which journalists construct environmental news in Scotland. She found that human sources of information are preferred to documentary sources in the library. Journalists are also constrained space and time for production of news stories.

Whitlam and Preston (1998) reported a study on sport journalism.

McGregor, Roesner, Charters & Holiday (2015) reported that improved digital communication technologies have empowered journalists worldwide. Security weaknesses in these same technologies, however, had put journalists and their sources increasingly at risk of identification, prosecution, and persecution by powerful entities, threatening efforts in investigative reporting and whistle blowing. The study found out that

existing security tools had seen limited adoption not just due to usability issues (a common culprit) but because of a mismatch between the assumed and actual practices, priorities, and constraints of journalists. This mismatch suggested that secured journalistic practices depended on a meaningful collaboration between computer security and journalism communities.

Nicholas and Martin (1998) observed that the journalists who participated in a study used latest technologies such as the Internet, PDAs and mobile phones at varying levels. They felt that it is most reliable and efficient way of reporting news. Similarly, Chinn (2000) reported that these digital gadgets are used by journalists for both seeking and gathering information for their work. The author claimed that in the past ten years IT had changed the needs and habits of both print and television journalists.

Nicholas and Williams (1998) describe how the Internet was impacting the information environment in the news room.

Two studies reported on role of social media as information sources for journalists. The first study by Diakopoulos, Choudhury and Naaman (2011) developed and investigated new methods for filtering and assessing the variety of sources found through social media by journalists. They took a human centered design approach to developing system, Seriously Rapid Source Review (SRSR), informed by journalistic practices. The second was a survey by Nora (2014) to determine how journalists 'verify' the news they get through social media. The findings of this study suggested that journalists are using social media for news gathering, but still rely on trusted sources.

5. Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- study the use and role of libraries in the writing and reporting activity of newspaper journalists,
- study the information seeking behavior of journalists,
- identify the problems faced by journalists, and
- identify main sources of information of journalists.

6. Methodology, Data Collection Tool and Procedure

The data collection tool was a structured questionnaire developed using Google forms. Approximately emails ids of 400 journalists in Maharashtra were identified by the researchers using a variety of sources (145 mail IDs were not viable and the mails bounced). 5 (1.25%) respondents

did not participate as per their company policy. Out of 250 (62.5%) respondents from 400 journalists to whom the questionnaire link was sent, 31(12.4%) respondents responded to the questionnaire in a span of 2 months (after many reminders). There were many factors that contributed to the low rate of response:

- Marathi newspapers were not providing email IDs of journalists. Some English newspapers provided email IDs of journalists whereas some provided only twitter IDs;
- Due to busy schedule of many journalists, they were unable to find time to respond;
- Some had changed their workplaces and some, even, their profession; and
- Journalists who were at high positions refused to fill up the questionnaire due to policy matters.

7. Pilot Study

The questionnaire was tested on 5 journalists and necessary changes were made based on the feedback to finalize the questionnaire (adding questions of type of journalist, years of experience as a journalist and also transforming some questions as multiple choice questions).

8. Findings

8.1 General Information

In the first part of the questionnaire data on designation, gender, years of experience, and type of journalist were gathered (Table 1).

Table 1. Different types of designations with number of respondents

Designations	Numbers of Respondents
Correspondent	6
Reporter	7
Assistant Editor	8
Principal correspondent	4
Content producer	1
Trainee Journalist	1
Sub-editor	1
Senior copy editor	1
Manager	1
Staff writer	1
Total	31

Out of 31 respondents 10(32.25%) were female journalists; About 12(39%) respondents had 1–5 years of experience, 9(29%) 6–10 years; 9(29%) 11–20 years and 1(3%) respondent had more than 40 years of experience in journalism. 27(87%) respondents were print journalists, 1(3.22%) respondent was broadcast journalist and 3(9.67%) respondents were other types of journalists. All respondents were associated with only one newspaper at the time of data collection.

8.2 Subject/Topic Covered by Journalists

Many respondents covered various issues relating to the society and the world. However, It was observed that 13(42%) covered other topics, mentioned by the respondents such as Health, Environment, Youth, Social issues, Civic, Community, Courts and Judiciary, Real estate, Music, Entertainment and Lifestyle, Women, Municipal corporation and Defense, etc. Arts and culture and crime topics were covered by one respondent, politics by 5(16%) respondents, Business and sports by 4 respondents followed by 3(10%) covering Education.

8.3 Information Gathering

It was found that 25(83.3%) respondents used Internet for information gathering. They also looked at various reports related to the incidents that they covered 23(76.7%) and contacting persons who were present at the site of the incidents 21(70%). Verbal communication with colleagues 15(50%) too were found to be useful to them for information gathering. A small number of, 8(26.7%) respondents also used other sources such as their contacts in various organizations, social media, contacts such as lawyers and judges for legal information, research papers.

An analysis of the responses indicated that journalists preferred personal correspondence, newspaper clippings and relevant government publications for gathering information. Discussion with colleagues was often employed to gather information; books figured in 3rd place as a source for gathering information.

8.4 Information Sources Used by Journalists

Just over 50% of the respondents mentioned that they physically visited their library when in need of information. Nearly a third of the respondents rarely or never visited the library when in need of information. One respondent even suggested that ‘Google has answers for every query and there is no need of library’. Less than a third of the respondents mentioned that they could retrieve the

information on their own from the library. More than two-thirds of the respondents required assistance from library staff to retrieve the information they needed. However, over 70% of the respondents indicated that the newspaper library was useful.

Social media figured high among the sources used by journalists as nearly 80% of the respondents were using social media. Over half the respondents also made use of Blogs for gathering information.

9. Challenges while Gathering the Information

For many respondents (21 or 67.74%) authenticity of the information was the major issue while collecting information. Other issues such as non-operational websites, individual biases lack of updated data/information on some websites were the other major issues faced by journalists.

10. Suggestions for Newspaper Library or Librarians (About Collection, ICT Services, Updated Information)

Over 66% of the respondents felt that digitization of resources and making them accessible online would help journalists in a big way. The need for better search mechanisms was also emphasized.

11. Conclusion

Information has become a vital resource for sustenance. To achieve professional competency in any area, the users need to obtain right information when needed. The working journalists associated with newspapers who are primarily concerned with news, views adopt strategies for collecting information from various sources. Increasingly journalists are coming to depend on the Internet as over 80% of respondents mentioned that they use Internet for information gathering. While the newspaper library was found to be useful by most respondents, the library was not the only source that journalists depended upon for gathering information. If the media library has to meet the information needs of journalists, it is imperative that the library should transform itself as a window/gateway providing access to a variety of resources including human sources of information, the Internet, Newspaper clippings, etc. in addition to books and journals.

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