

Chapter 4

Collaborative Journalism: Networks, News Media and the Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

Journalists' responsibility has an intrinsic relation with the economic and socio-political institutions within which they work. To bring the notion of collaboration into the discussion of journalism and news media organization—irrespective of whether it is technological or social—would thus broaden its conventional intention of studying the social dynamics by which news is produced within key social institutions, and ultimately to propose a method for correlating the changing facets due to collaborative Web with established theories of the relationship between discourse, professional practices, and economic endeavors. What this chapter argues is that collaboration does not hinge only between a professional and an amateur, or trained reporters and common citizens, or perhaps more commonly, different kinds of media; rather, it is a much greater transformation since it is a collaboration between society and technology with its palpable economic implications. In this context, this chapter attempts to understand the emergence of “network entrepreneur” and his/her engagement with the multiple discursive and institutional networks. By referring to various mainstream and alternative news media organizations in India and beyond, this chapter questions in what way news media and journalistic practices are reconfiguring to accommodate a more collaborative platform that embraces participatory, networked, hypermediated journalism.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade and a half, we have begun to witness a radical change in the organization of information production. Enabled by technological change, we are beginning to see a series of economic, social, and cultural adaptations that make possible a fundamental transformation of how one constitutes the information environment one occupies as autonomous individuals, citizens, and members of cultural and social groups. A string of changes in the technology, economic organization, and social practices of production within this environment has created emerging opportunities for how we produce, disseminate and exchange information, knowledge, and culture. The transformation brought about by the collaborative networked information environment is deep-seated that brings fundamental structural changes. It points to the very basis of how liberal markets and liberal democracies have coevolved for almost two centuries.

At present there are more than 60,000 titles registered as newspapers in India; almost 9,000 of these are being published on a regular basis. Besides, there are more than one hundred national television channels and hundreds of local channels, as well as large number of private radio stations especially in the metros (Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2006). Parallel to this, within the ambit of what is popularly known as “new media” there is consistent development that presently rivals the traditional media segments as well. Most of the established media organizations have already stepped in to the new media sector, with web and mobile services. Websites like *indiatimes.com*, *manoramaonline.com*, *hindutantimes.com*, *rediff.com*, *in.com*, *merinews.com*, *oneindia.in*, *sulekha.com* have created a niche for themselves. Indian media have outperformed the overall Indian economy; they are expected to be over US\$18.6 billion by 2010. Nonetheless, in keeping with the corporatization of journalism, web journalism in India has essentially become an

extension of the already established news media business, predominantly producing, among other things, market-friendly soft stories and popular syndicated content.

However, disagreements continue to unfold regarding which website deserves to be acknowledged as news website, with different interested parties each staking their respective claim. This controversy stems primarily from disagreements over how best to define what constitutes a news site as distinct from other related types of sites. Much of the early, experimental work was conducted by newspaper companies placing their news reports online, thereby blurring – some might say remediating – traditional categories. Somewhat crudely, I suggest that Indian news media sites can be categorized into four different groups. The first group consists of the sites that are primarily Web extensions of the existing print media publication or news agencies: *timesofindia.com*, *manoramaonline.com*, *hindustantimes.com*, *hinduonnet.com*, *indianexpress.com*, *tehelka.com* and *ptinews.com*. The second comprises sites that are similar extensions of the recognized news broadcast media: *ibnlive.in.com*, *ndtv.com*, *timesnow.tv*, *zeenews.com* and *aajtak.com*. The third is the purely online news sites, which, besides Google and Yahoo! India news services, include *merinews.com*, *india-newsbehindnews.com*, *indiatgether.com* and *indianews.net*. The fourth is the news portals, which are relatively popular in terms of traffic ranking: *rediff.com*, *indiatimes.com*, *sify.com*, *oneindia.in*, *123india.com* and so on (Chattopadhyay, 2010, p. 293).

Within this perspective, in this chapter I examine a particular intersection of the emerging collaborative practices within the domain of web journalism and the more pervasive changes being perceptible in socio-economic sphere. These changes have most visibly affected the journalistic practices or the production of news both by individuals and by cooperative efforts in a wide range of loosely or tightly woven collaborations. However, the social significance of such col-

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