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Advancing Journalistic Excellence: Elevating News Quality Standards Across Media Platforms for Multimedia Journalists

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ABSTRACT

As newsrooms converge and adopt cross-media approaches, maintaining journalistic standards is paramount. Broadcast media organizations must embrace this model to ensure quality news across platforms and enhance journalistic practices among Multimedia Journalists (MJs). Adapting to evolving determinants of news value, including immediacy and multimedia integration, signifies a fundamental shift in news conception, production, and dissemination. Failure to adapt risks losing relevance and audience, thereby diminishing the organization's impact in the public sphere. Five research objectives were pursued: i) Identifying elements crucial for developing news quality standards on cross-media platforms as perceived by MJs ii) Understanding challenges in maintaining news quality on cross-media platforms from the perspective of MJs iii) Investigating transformations in MJs' practices affecting cross-media platforms iv) Exploring collaboration between news management and MJs on cross-media platforms to enhance journalistic practices v) Proposing strategies for newsroom management to overcome obstacles faced by MJs on cross-media platforms in delivering high-quality journalism. Insights from interviews with 30 MJs and news editors highlight the fusion of ethical journalism with engaging digital storytelling. MJs balance speed with rigorous fact-checking, viewing their work as a social responsibility. Emphasized are collaboration, strategic newsroom changes, and supportive HR practices. Media organizations must evolve to stay relevant, while MJs require skills to navigate digital news. This model aims to assist MJs and media organizations in producing high-quality, newsworthy content, potentially integrating into journalism school curricula.

Keywords: multimedia journalist; news quality; cross-media platform; journalistic practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Crafting high-quality news across cross-media platforms is crucial for fostering informed public discourse and upholding journalistic integrity. The proliferation of news sites, live broadcasts, and social media platforms allows easy access to diverse content, prompting Malaysian mainstream media to adopt cross-media platforms for expanded coverage. This shift, starting around 2010, marked by cross-media convergence, led to the emergence of Multimedia Journalists (MJs) and altered traditional newsroom dynamics (Esa et al., 2022). Standardized

routines guided by media organizations are crucial for navigating future journalism practices (Srisaracam, 2022).

Distinctive features of digital news platforms highlight the evolving nature of news quality standards (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2020). Zelizer (2019) posited that digital journalism integrates technological and business elements with traditional journalistic practices. Mumay's (2019) research emphasised readers' emphasis on both quality and trustworthiness across online and print platforms. To gain insights into establishing standards of news quality on cross-media platforms from media practitioners' perspectives, interviews were conducted with MJs and News Editors from four leading Malaysian broadcast media organizations: Astro Awani, Media Prima Berhad, BernamaTV, and RTM. These outlets were chosen for their representation of mainstream broadcast media in Malaysia, embracing convergence within their operations to adapt to the evolving media landscape. This study aims to elevate news quality standards across media platforms for multimedia journalists, advancing journalistic excellence.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized qualitative in-depth interviews and a phenomenological approach to gather data. Purposive sampling was employed to select 20 Multimedia Journalists (MJs) and 10 News Editors from four prominent Malaysian broadcast media organizations. This sample selection is crucial for exploring cross-media platform adoption within a specific cultural context. Sampling continued until saturation was reached, indicating redundancy or no emergence of new themes. In-depth interviews, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018), involve semi-structured or unstructured questioning, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of complex issues. This approach is widely used in the social sciences and various other disciplines for collecting detailed and nuanced data, as emphasized by Chapman and Brunsma (2021). The interviews were conducted online using Google Meet, and NVivo 12 software was used to analyze the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to elevate news quality standards across media platforms for multimedia journalists. In the context of this study, the researcher found that accuracy, objectivity, transparency, timeliness, and engagement are key elements emphasised by informants in developing such standards on cross-media platforms. These elements provide a framework for news organisations to produce high-quality news content that is informative, relevant, and trustworthy.

"I prioritize accuracy, balance, and clarity, setting us apart from citizen journalists. Our credibility stems from reliable sources, distinguishing us significantly." (MJ 1)

Moreover, maintaining the integrity and quality of news reporting across various media platforms presents many challenges for MJs. In the context of this study, several critical concerns were emphasised by the informants, including the burgeoning phenomenon of citizen journalism, which has both democratized and complicated the field. According to Mahamed et al. (2021), while citizen journalism opens up news reporting to a wider array of voices, it often lacks ethical rigor and professional standards traditionally observed by established news outlets.

"My biggest fear is making factual errors in a rush, like once with a Minister, spreading fast on social media. I now triple-check to minimize errors, though distractions can still cause slip-ups." (MJ 2)

Additionally, the transformation of broadcast journalists into MJs represents a profound shift in the dynamics of the journalism profession. As they adapt to their changing roles, these journalists become adept multitaskers, driven by enthusiasm for their work and motivated by a deep-seated discipline. Their evolution has had a ripple effect on cross-media platform work practices, shaping the way news is produced and consumed in the digital age.

"Journalists now face a relentless workload due to the digital age. We handle live Facebook broadcasts, social media updates, photos, and videos on-site. It can be overwhelming, especially for big stories. We feel guilty if we can't assist the office, as it's our duty." (MJ3)

Hence, the importance of collaboration between news management and MJs in contemporary media landscapes is attracting increasing academic attention. Building upon a rich corpus of prior research, including the seminal works of Deuze (2004) and Pavlik (2014), it becomes evident that such collaborative endeavours enrich journalistic practices and contribute to resilience within a complex and rapidly changing media ecosystem. This study explores the intricate collaboration between news management and MJs across four mainstream broadcast media agencies in Malaysia.

"Editors often have various requests, so communication between editors and MJs is crucial. MJs need to explain any obstacles and offer solutions. Without good communication, the newsroom can't function well." (MJ 4)

Lastly, the findings indicated that newsroom culture, characterised by encouragement, a progressive mindset, and individual initiative, is intrinsic in shaping the professional disposition and productivity of MJs. The nurturing and motivational ambiance within the newsroom catalyzes creative ingenuity and innovative pursuits (Hassan & Elmasry, 2019). Moreover, promoting individual initiative engenders a sense of professional accountability, drives MJs to explore innovative narrative avenues, and enhances overall journalistic quality (Srisaracam, 2022).

"...It's important, and the company needs to invest in reporter training. I attended a special investigation course where I learned techniques that enhance skills, foster creativity, and provide new insights." (MJ 5).

4. IMPLICATION OF STUDY

Briefly, in re-examining Galtung and Ruge's in 1965 news value theory, this study integrates contemporary scholarly critiques and insights to recalibrate news values for modern cross-media platforms. Joye et al. (2016) offer a critical retrospective on this model, synthesizing various scholarly critiques and adaptations to address how the digital age influences journalistic methods. This study extends their work by considering the contexts at individual, organizational, and societal levels in understanding representation, identity, production, regulations, and consumption.

4.1. Individual Level: Representation and Identity

At the individual level, attention to representation and identity is crucial. Multimedia Journalists (MJs) acknowledge the need to maintain integrity in news reporting while confronting challenges such as misinformation and the rise of citizen journalism. MJs have transformed into consumer multitaskers in response to contemporary journalism's demands, disseminating news

across traditional broadcast channels and the digital realm. Their primary responsibility lies in ensuring the timely and substantive delivery of news.

4.2. Organizational Level: Production and Regulation

At the organizational level, there is a need for media organizations to support their journalists in becoming multi-skilled and adaptable. Guided by the principles of news value theory, which identify the elements that make a story newsworthy, adaptability is crucial to ensure that news content meets the evolving criteria of significance, relevance, and interest to the audience. Collaboration between news management and MJs is essential in crafting stories that resonate with these news values, with effective communication being a foundational pillar supporting their dynamic relationship.

4.3. Societal Level: Consumption

At the societal level, consumption is pivotal in maintaining news quality on cross-media platforms. Media practitioners must adhere to journalistic principles, meet public demand, utilize multimedia narratives, understand clickbait and keywords, and monitor social media trends. Mainstream journalists must ensure shared news prompts the public to seek accurate information, aligning with news value theory's criteria of impact, relevance, and timeliness. Achieving news quality on cross-media platforms demands understanding at individual, organizational, and societal levels, ensuring alignment with the evolving media landscape's workflow.

5. CONCLUSION

Implementing this standard is crucial for Malaysian journalists to bolster their performance and credibility across various media platforms. Adhering to journalistic principles lays the groundwork for maintaining news quality, while considering the evolving demands of the public is equally vital. Malaysian journalists face multifaceted challenges, from real-time reporting to combating misinformation, emphasizing the need for rigorous verification processes and ethical guidelines. The evolving journalism landscape underscores the importance of continual professional development. Effective newsroom management is pivotal, promoting professional growth, fostering a supportive environment, and investing in technological infrastructure. Integrating such standards upholds news integrity, driving innovation to meet diverse audience expectations. This model aims to assist MJs and media organizations in producing high-quality, newsworthy content, potentially integrating into journalism school curricula. Additionally, exploring audience perceptions of news quality for future study will further provide a holistic view of the model's effectiveness.

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