



NEWS MARKETING ON SOCIAL MEDIA WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON CONSUMERS OF NEWS CONTENT FROM MEDIA OUTLETS IN INDIA

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Abstract: “The truth is that every news channel is a variant of the other and the difference is one of degree.” – Barkha Dutt, Journalist.

The field of news and journalism and its marketing has flowered into an area which is of great interest to researchers, media outlets, journalists and practitioners of marketing both in the public and private sector. News media organizations have marketed their content while disseminating news in print, radio and television and now continue to do so while on social media. However, with a high level of research and study both in the practical world and online there have been few attempts to look at the impact of these marketing efforts on the readers of news media content and the way that they engage with it.

This paper aims at understanding how news media organizations market their content on social media and how it impacts the readers and consumers of such content. For the purpose of this study we use primary data to determine what metrics determine engagement on news content on social media along with the reader reaction to genres and forms of news content while secondary data was used to determine the commonalities of highly engaged news content. For this study data was collected from users of social media platforms living in India. The secondary data for the study comes from post engagement data taken from the ThePrint.in 's Instagram page for further analysis and comparison with data obtained through the survey.

Through this study we were able to establish certain metrics that determine high engagement depending upon the form and genre of content. The study also shows how news media organizations can promote their work on social media in a much more dynamic and targeted manner so as to reach a wider audience and help spread relevant facts to the masses.

Index Terms – Journalism, marketing, news, social media, India

I. INTRODUCTION

News media has changed the way the world receives and interprets information. At the same time, the world has adapted and changed the way news is gathered and spread. And it is commonly agreed that it all started in the early 16th century around Germany in Europe where periodicals which could be considered to be the first newspapers started appearing in the public. The field of news media has grown exponentially since then and exploded in growth in the past few decades. With the advent of the internet, the industry has made leaps and bounds since its inception and has flourished into the mammoth that it is today. Although this growth has been staggered due to a myriad of reasons from restrictive government policies stopping true journalism to ideological content and propaganda being branded as news. There have been many factors that have helped promote or stifle the propagation of news. Readership has also been growing at the same time at a steady pace as literacy levels on a global scale have increased and continue to do so. Another reason for this is due to the fact that internet has allowed even smaller papers to have the access to a global audience. People in exchange rely on the information to shape their view of society and world around them. The viewers also now have

access to not just quantity of different news but also to different forms of content as well. This has pitted both traditional media and new forms like the internet against each other forcing the old guard to adapt to the new one.

News content and its industrious growth can be attributed to not just the broadcasting of truth and facts but also the way in which the content itself is promoted. Promotion is an important aspect for news as it leads to solidifying legitimacy and trustworthiness of the media outlet and its content. In a fast moving industry as news media, it is forever important to stay at the forefront of news and given the how with the prevalence of internet it has become even more necessary to get one's content to appear before as many people as it can. In other words, being one of the first links to appear on a Google search query is of supreme importance for content creators and marketers, even more so for news.

Thus there have been benefits and challenges for the journalists, media outlets and marketers living in the information age. Web 2.0 and social media have been another curve ball thrown at them, one which made adapting to the internet look like child's play. Many tried to adapt and failed while others jumped ship and evolved into solely web based information providers. Media outlets native to the internet have flourished in the past decade even more so than web logs did in the early days of the internet. Examples of these would be BuzzFeed, ScoopWhoop, The Quint etc. These outlets and many such like them paved the way and showed the blueprint for achieving success using technology and guided mainstream media outlets to do the same. This success was not without knowing how to market and promote their content to the netizens of the global world. News content is consumed online through social media on a mass scale on a daily basis. Today more people have access to the facts and happenings from around the world than ever before. Recent updates are reported in minutes and content that used to take days for multiple journalist to write is produced in hours. This steep uphill growth doesn't come without drawbacks however it is fascinating to observe nonetheless. Newsrooms have put social media on the forefront of their objectives and use it like a tool not just to share news but also to gather facts and data as well. Marketers of news now cannot afford to not use social media as doing so would lead to not getting enough coverage, views and interest from the public thereby impacting their ability to earn exponentially. This is better described in later sections of the paper. News media industry shows promise in the future as well. With careful study, measured expectations and better training of marketing managers, media outlets can benefit immensely.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The standard understanding of news would be the reception and dissemination of the most recent and most striking or important events relevant to the current period of time. A much clearer understanding of what makes news and events different was prescribed by Galtung and Ruge in their ground-breaking paper wherein they looked at twelve parameters which give an event the title of news (Ruge, 1965). Harcup and O'Neill however re-examined these parameters to discover that most news stories no longer come under the original twelve parameters, along with the fact that lots of the stories do not emerge from particular events at all. They devised ten up-to-date news value requirements of which at least one needs to be fulfilled so as to be considered news. It also detaches from looking at news from the binary event based perspective and opens up to a much more diverse perception of what news has come to be (Harcup, 2001). An even more comprehensive way to look at news media is to view it as a social construct which allows us to look at journalism and the news content produced in a dynamic form and not as fixed and un-evolving. This implies that news content is composed of various audio, visual, conceptual and opinionated elements that are forever changing and growing. Analysis from a myriad of sources allows us to legitimize the notion of news being a social construct (Tuchman, 1978). In a democratic government the most model news media setup would ideally give more (or the most) attention to the overarching elements that have a broad impact on most of the general population. It is however disheartening to know the fact that this model setup is non-existent across the globe as the current institutions within the news industry rarely promote issues with long term effects and instead focus on generating indifference, pessimism and a distrust towards factual evidence (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). In India news content and its generation and dissemination suffers from a wide variety of issues such as integrity, morality and precision. Along with this, multiple journalists are getting arrested and various news media organisations are under the threat of being shut down. This causes the influence being held by viewers and consumers of news content to be greater than that being wielded by the producers of such content. This causes greater competencies of individuals in the news production field and enables marginalized and downtrodden groups to have the ability to speak their truth (Biswal, 2019).

With new developments in technology across the globe there has been a shift in the ways news is not just spread but also created. New media forms such as the internet and social media platforms allow for better communication across multiple channels. Viewers now have a higher stake in the creation of news content. This happens due to individuals amongst the general public now being able to communicate back with the content producers thereby

influencing the content being created (Leopoldina Fortunati, 2009). The truly fascinating result of this is that the overall experience of viewers of content on digital platforms is linked to the quality of participation of all interested parties (which includes the viewers too) and is thereby determined by the knowledge and abilities possessed by them. Customers however often face trouble assigning value to the content due to the dynamic nature of digital technology which leads to rapid changes in prices along with the fact that value is assigned through the consumption of the content (Rowley, 2008). Various studies have been done to determine how users of the internet are consuming news while online. A study done on the American public showcases how 16% of all news consumed online came from social media (Bica, 2019). It has been studied that viewers can immediately determine the form of news content when certain pieces of content are shown to them and it also influences their perception of the content itself. Different content forms also influence level of devotion with which news is consumed and how well the viewer can remember the facts and details of the story (Grabe, 2003). It has become necessary for news media organizations to promote the news content that they report on. Failing in doing so causes less traffic on their website(s) and other channels. It results in stories getting barely a third of the readers which is not beneficial in an industry where the product being marketed is more or less the same as that of a competitor (Anna Puji Lestari, 2018). However, this is not a novel idea as news has always had to be marketed and promoted to enhance reader experience. Times Group has made changes along the way to make their newspapers better, not in terms of the content but in terms of modifying the method of content delivery i.e. the paper itself. Readers were very ardent to notice the changes which explains how important the forms of media are in which news is shown to the public (Dr. M. K. Sridhar, 2003). Teenagers now get most of their news from the people around them such as acquaintances, family and peers through social media. Teenagers seem to be distrustful of official news media outlets however this is due to the fact that they are more attracted by fraudulent information, news showing sarcastic point of views and opinions along with websites and platform which are not verified media outlets (Marchi, 2012).

Mukerjee determined that even though solely digital media outlets are fewer than traditional media outlets they are not completely outperformed by traditional media outlets in terms of viewership. However, that does not mean that digital media outlets pose to be a strong contender to the mainstream media. Along with this comes the fact that regional media outlets have dwindled in readership and have lost readers significantly over the years (Mukerjee, 2020). Social media has been found to contributing to a great degree when studying the visitation and viewership of online news. Users' reaction to different types of news shown online also varies to a great degree due to the nature of the news itself (Castillo, El-Haddad, Pfeffer, & Stempeck, 2014). While journalists are now using the influence of social media to gather and spread news alongside using other tools like really simple syndication, most editors and major news media outlets are cautious of using social media due to its dynamic and unpredictable nature. Though the overall agreement is that social media will indubitably change the nature of news media the fear of not being able to remain the regulator of stories plagues many managers in news media organizations (Alejandro, 2015). The employees handling social media engagement and prevalence now expect journalists to tweet about the story once it has been proven to be true and factual. That's right, journalists are expected to get the story out there without even writing completely about it. Once they do write about it they are expected to tweet about it again with a link to the article as this helps the story and the article appear on Google search results quicker. In this way reporters have been elevated to the role of marketers (Jr., 2015). With the advent of the internet and social media, the probability of spreading misinformation has multiplied manifold. Having an easy access to the internet therefore means that individuals are more susceptible to engaging and believing fabricated information designed to look like news. Apprehensions regarding misinformation are mostly shaped due to partisanship, access to unfettered platform like WhatsApp and low level of faith in the news industry itself (Tabarez Ahmed Neyazi, 2021). This paper will aim to contribute to the field of marketing in the news industry by providing relevant and key takeaways from how it affects news media organizations and their readers on social media. This research paper highlighted the relationship between news organisations' use of Twitter and their website traffic, how the size of the social media networks affects the estimated association. Various online media organisations' traffic volumes were compared in this research paper. The research paper proves that there is a positive relationship between the two variable (Twitter and Newspapers' social media adoption) (Hong, 2012). This research paper examines how political propaganda is disseminated via WhatsApp as "news" (fake news). It also looks at what makes WhatsApp such a potent tool in the Indian context, how individuals use it, and how the country's legal framework makes it challenging to identify the source of fake news. WhatsApp, being an effective smartphone app has improved communication by making it simple, inexpensive, and user-friendly, but India has turned it into a powerful instrument for propaganda. It is the perfect vehicle for disseminating rumours and false information for a variety of reasons. These include the application's technological attributes, such as its capability for multimedia material, ease of use, and end-to-end encryption, which makes it impossible to track the source of a message (FAROOQ, 2018). This paper will aim to

contribute to the field of marketing in the news industry by providing relevant and key takeaways from how it affects news media organizations and their readers on social media.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To understand what makes users of social media platforms engage with news content while on the platforms,
2. To study and determine the commonalities of highly engaged news posts on social media.
3. To find out the reader reaction to the types and forms of news content being published on social media by news media outlets.

IV. SCOPE OF STUDY

This project has an overall aim of understanding how news content is marketed on social media by various news media organizations in India. Through this project we shall study and understand the level of user engagement with news content and reasons for the same along with understanding user reaction to the same content. The primary study of the project looks at Indian users of Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and how they engage with news content posted by news media outlets. These platforms have been chosen due to their size and popularity amongst different demographics in the recent years. The age demographics included in this study are from the ages of 15 to 56 and above. Platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram have not been included as official news media outlets are not present here to publish and post news content. Marketing efforts made by news media outlets on the platforms itself is the focus of this project. Various other backdoor marketing efforts by such outlets have not been looked at in this project.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on both primary as well as secondary data. The primary data is collected using an online survey circulated among individuals from ages of 15 to 56 and above. The survey helped gather useful information on the engagement and reactions of social media users of the four chosen platforms in relation to their interaction with news content. It includes four basic questions to ascertain the basic demographics of the respondents along with ten additional questions to gauge reaction and engagement. It looked at data gathered from 131 respondents of various different ages and from different states in India. This was done in lieu of understanding how the news content being marketed by media companies is impacting and if it is driving engagement from the consumers of such content. In the following sections of the paper this data will be analyzed to understand how the participants engage and react to different kinds of news items.

The secondary data is the post engagement data taken from Instagram page of ThePrint, a news and media website. ThePrint was selected as it happens to be one of the nation's biggest online news websites with a massive audience and giant subscriber base. The data collected was studied and analyzed in depth so as to understand the commonalities in highly engaged news content pieces and comparing it with the relevance it had at the time of publication along with seeing if the way in which media outlet promotes content is similar to the results gathered from the online survey.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Primary Data Analysis

For the primary study of this paper data was collected from a sample size of 131 respondents. First let us understand the respondents themselves. On the basis of age respondents have been divided into five groups which are 15-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55 and 56 and above. Fig 1 shows the breakdown of respondents on the basis of age.

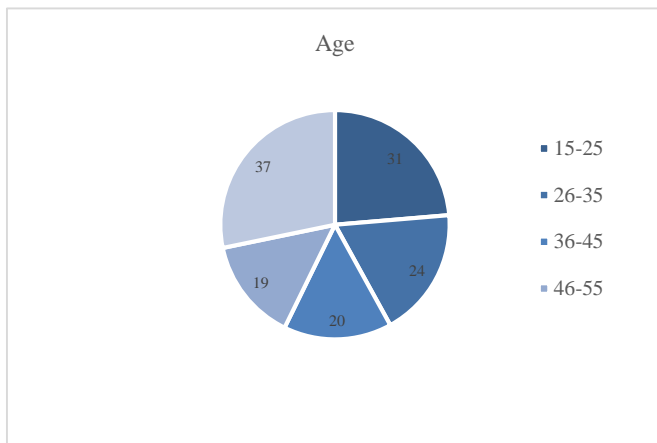


Figure 1 Age

As shown through the above graph there is a slight deficit in the number of respondents from 46-55 age group which is perhaps due to the fact that mainstream media holds a stronger grasp over people in this age group in comparison to news through social media.

Taking a look at how the gender breakup of the respondents of the primary study, the options given to the participants were male, female and other. The other option was included to involve any individuals who do not choose to identify as either male or female. However, none of the respondents from this group identify outside the category of male or female. Regardless it is still felt important to include it as a category. Fig 2 shows that the participants skew towards identifying as males by a decent margin. While the gender categorization of individuals isn't equally represented, efforts have been made to make sure the data pool is fairly equitable.

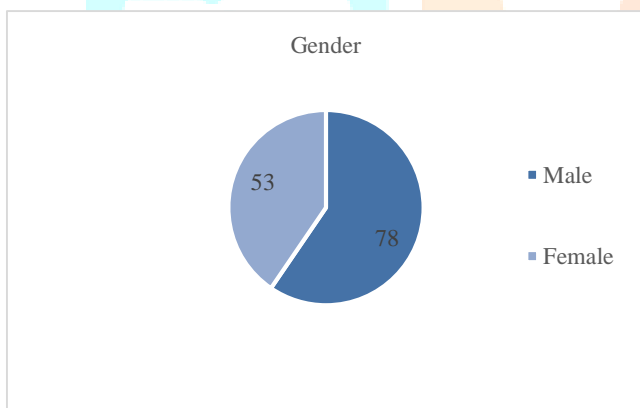


Fig 2 Gender

And finally looking at the geographical locations of the participants in the survey, Table 1 shows the states/union territories they hail from:

State/Union Territory	Number of respondents
Andhra Pradesh	2
Bihar	1
Chandigarh	1
Delhi	42
Goa	1
Gujarat	2
Haryana	3
Hyderabad	2
Jharkhand	1
Karnataka	1
Kerala	1
Madhya Pradesh	2
Maharashtra	29
Rajasthan	3
Tamil Nadu	3
Telangana	2
Uttar Pradesh	19
West Bengal	5
Total	131

Table 1 showing geographical location of respondents

Most number of responses are form Delhi, from where a record 32.06% of the respondents hail. Hence, the participants of the study are spread across 18 different states and union territories.

Before we get into discussing the impact of news content marketing through social media on users it is felt important that we look at how familiar the respondents are with the social media platforms being studied. In the given Fig 3 we see a graph showing the social media platforms which the participants tend to prefer using.

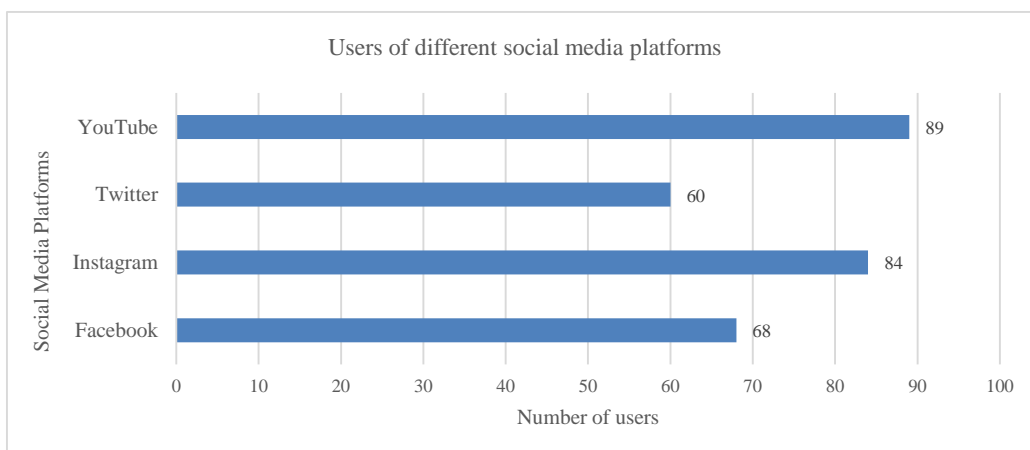


Fig 3 Users of different social media platforms

Here we see that the total number of YouTube users from the sample is 89. The same for Twitter, Instagram and Facebook are 60, 84 and 68. The number of people who use only Facebook are 5. The number of people who use only Instagram are 9. People using just Twitter are 5 and people using just YouTube are 19. The number of people from the sample using all four platforms is 25 people.

When looking at whether or not the respondents prefer consuming news through social media Fig 4 shows a pie chart mapping the preferences of the respondents.

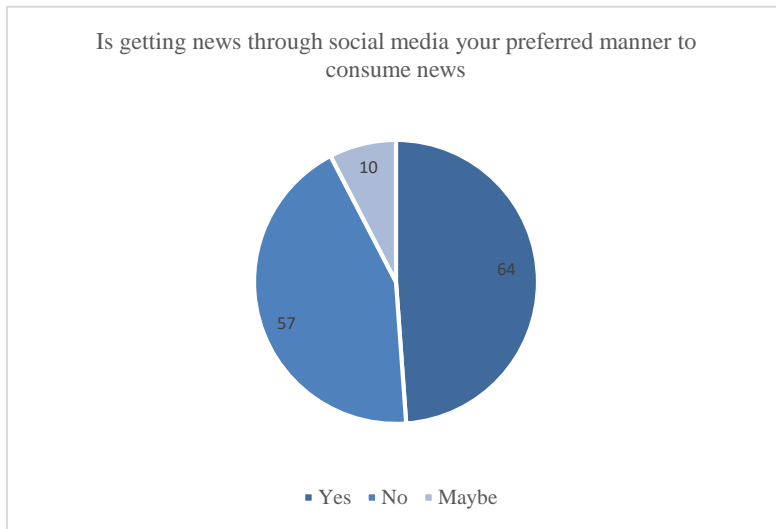


Fig 4 Preferred manner to consume news

It is interesting to note that while most of the respondents use at least one social media platform of the selected four, when it comes to consuming news the majority of them are not too keen on doing so through social media. This is an important piece of information for news organizations in the age of social media prevalence as it shows most people are not going to be looking extensively into consuming news content on social media. The next set of data however is at odds with this.

Fig 5 shows that most of the respondents agree with being in the middle regarding news consumption on social media. This shows that although people do not look out for news actively they are not against it being shown on social media and do read into it when shown to them. This also shows that more number of participants actively consume news (i.e. 51 people) than those who don't (i.e. 40 people).

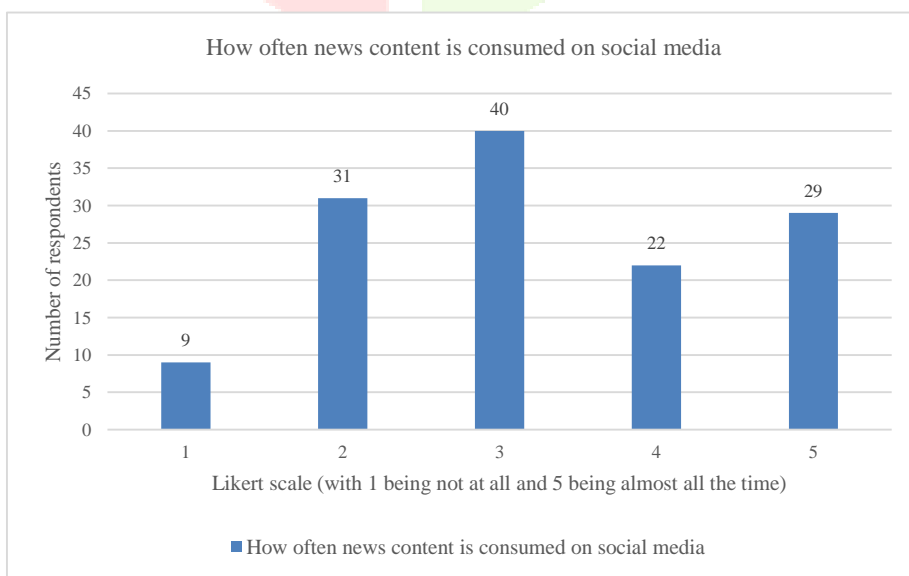


Fig 5 How often news content is consumed on social media

From Fig 6 we see that Times of India has the largest following out of the news outlets given in the list. Respondents were allowed to mention other news outlets that were not on the list and these included AajTak, Zee, Economic Times, WION etc. Out of those no one outlet has a large enough following to be displayed separately and hence have been clubbed together as one category. This showcases the fact that the individuals in our sample do stay updated with the current happenings in the world even though doing so through social media might not be their preferred way of doing the same.

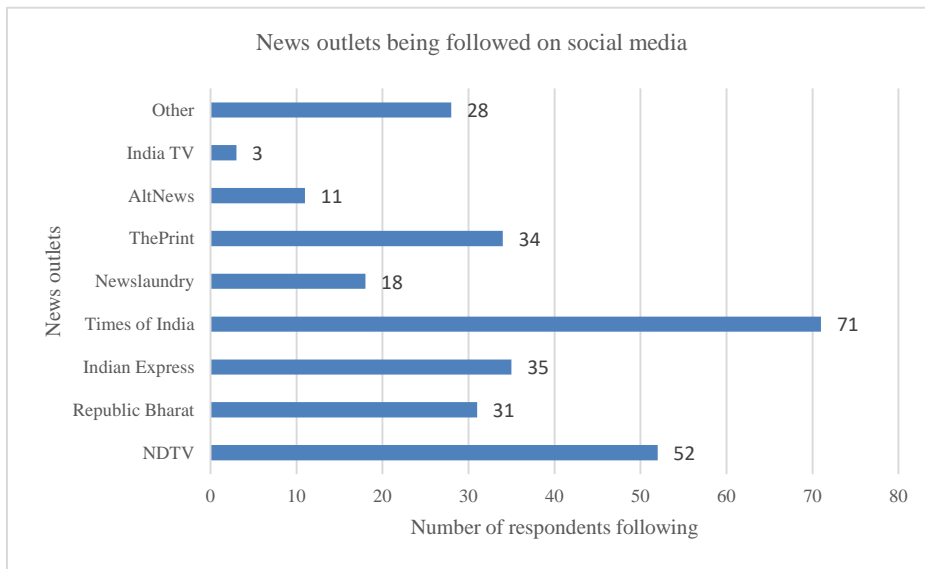


Fig 6 showing following of social media

Now that we know which outlets which are being followed, let us look the kind of news itself which the respondents are interested in. Fig 7 showcases which sub-genres of news content do the respondents prefer. From the data gathered it is seen that those who follow Times of India have a stronger preference for business, political and investigative news content than the other news outlets. Those who follow Indian Express have a stronger inclination towards following science, technological and educational news. This is important as it impacts how news outlets can better market to their audience based on their audience’s preferences. Using social media directed sponsored posts can be shown to viewers showing news stories which the individuals are most interested in. This will help direct engagement for the media outlets.

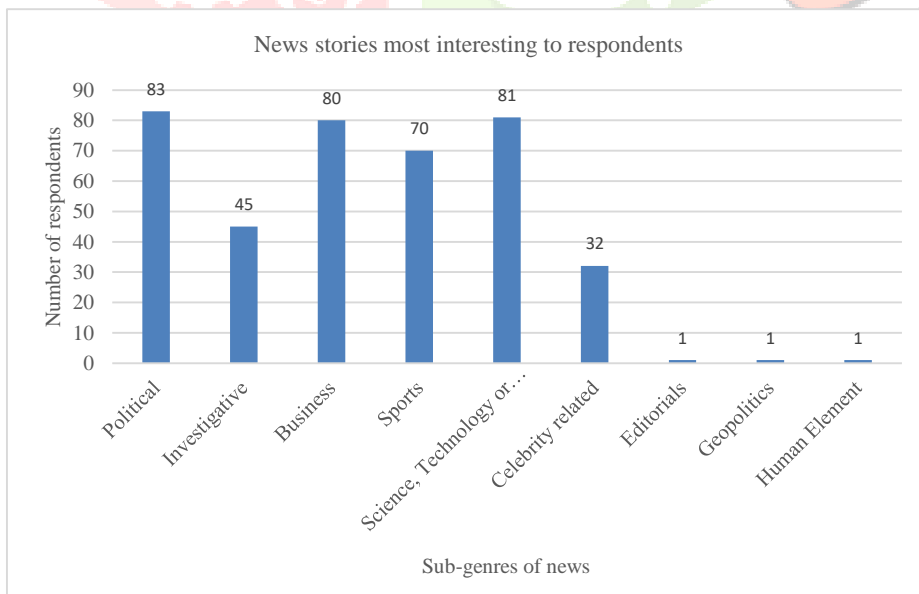


Fig 7 News stories most interesting to respondents

Now we look at how different forms in which news content is shown to the viewers impacts them and their likelihood of engagement with the same on social media. Fig 8 showcases the same.

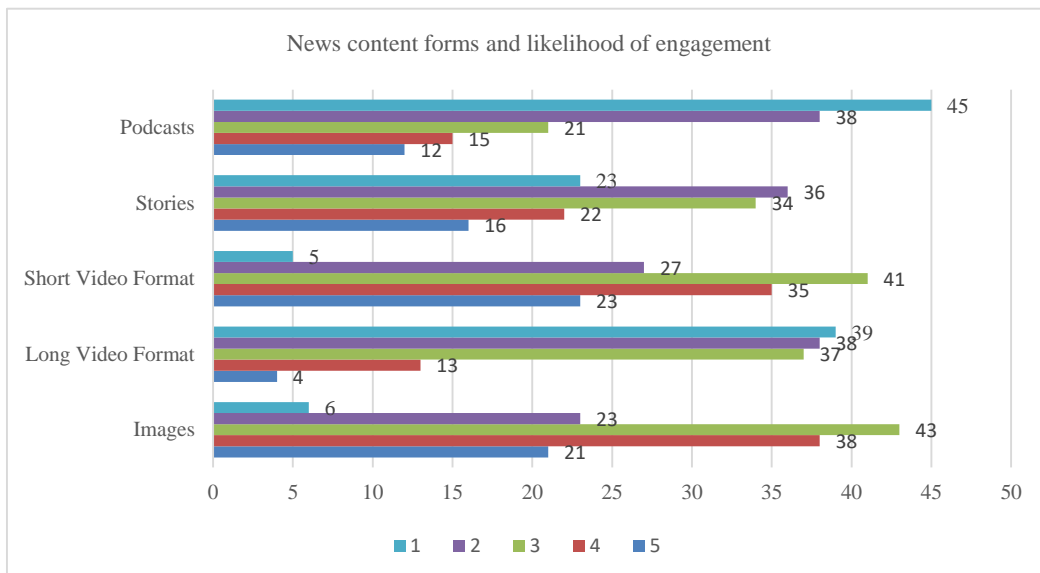


Fig 8 News content forms and likelihood of engagement

The graph showcases that podcasts have the least likelihood of being engaged with while short video format videos and images have a higher likelihood gaining engagement. This is most probably due to the ease of access, simpler content and low watch time which causes this. This means that news media outlets must focus on these.

Out of the respondents, 26.7% of them believe that news shown in sponsored post format will have an effect on how and whether they engage with a certain piece of news content. Though this may not seem that definitive in comparison to the 22.9% who feel that sponsored posts will have no effect on their reaction to a piece of content. The other respondents are equitably spread out with another 22.9% falling right in the middle. The respondents expressed that when shown factual piece of news content most (57.5%) of them would like the post. A whopping 42% said they would share the piece of content further thereby increasing its reach. When asked if the news content being shown was propagating false information the overwhelming response (64%) from the participants of the study was that they would choose not to engage with it and just ignore the post. A minority 19.2% said that they would comment on the content which would most likely be a negative feedback. Fig 9 illustrates that the most polarizing figure when it comes to engagement of news content on social media is the topic being talked about. A close second is the news outlet from which the content is from. This is alerting for a number of reasons as it shows that news media outlets hold a sort of viewer loyalty when it comes to driving engagement on social media. The respondents also stated that the ideology being supported is although an important driver of engagement it still ranks the lowest among the other factors.

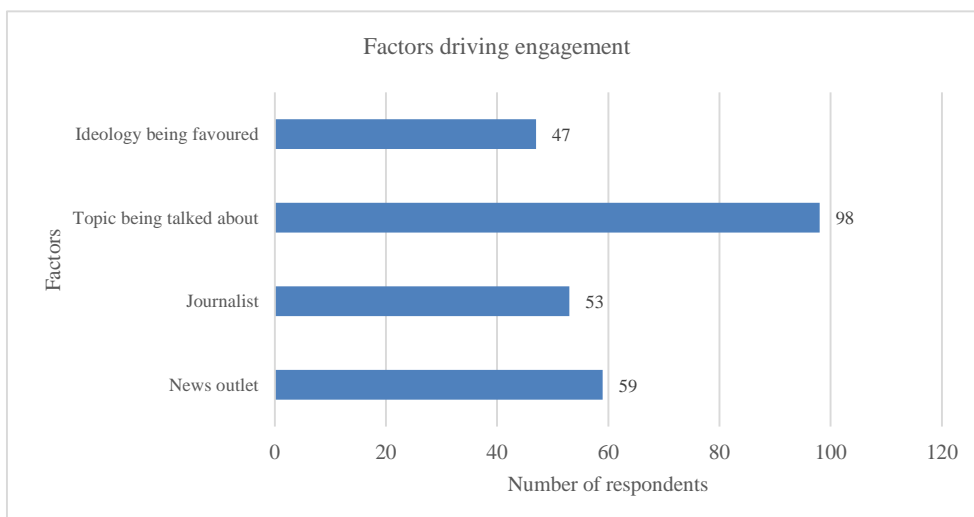


Fig 9 Factors driving engagement

Secondary Data Analysis

For this section of the study we collected engagement statistics from the Instagram account of ThePrint, an online newspaper and digital media company. The data was collected on a daily basis for almost a month. Each day at 2300 hours the engagement statistics from the posts of the previous days were collected so as to chart commonalities in highly engaged posts. The data collection began on 1st April 2022 and lasted till 28th April 2022.

We looked at the following types of posts:

1. Image posts
2. Stories
3. Short form videos
4. Long form videos

(Instagram Reels were considered under short form videos.)

In total we looked at 439 posts of all different types.

The breakdown of the same is as follows:

Image posts – 378	Long form videos – 37
Short form videos – 24	Stories – 351

Following Fig 10 showcases the daily story posts as below. Stories contained news content as it happened i.e. new developments throughout the day along with other prescheduled content and promotional pieces as well.

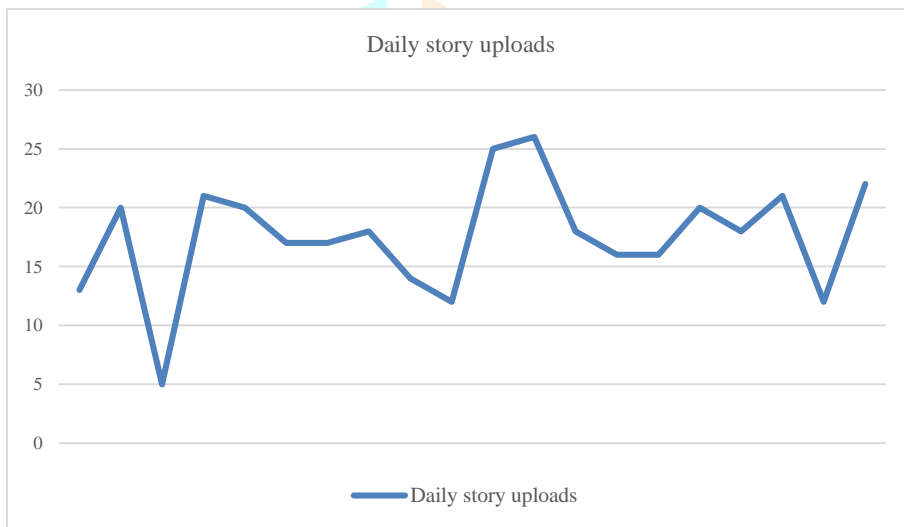


Fig 10 Daily story uploads

From the above data we use the following formula to calculate the mean number of stories:

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\text{Sum of all observations}}{\text{Number of observations}}$$

$$= \frac{351}{20}$$

= 17.55 or 18 stories on average per day.

The mode of the story uploads was 26 stories in one day.

Every day the most liked post was an image post. This reiterates the primary data analysis regarding the respondents’ preference of different content forms. The most viewed video every day happened to be a short form video. This seems to be an important statistics and under looked statistic with ThePrint’s management as shorter videos would be easier and quicker to produce and film. This would help get more views. Although it is understandable that not all news pieces can be broken down into small segments however more could be done here.

The average comments on each post can be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Average comments} = \frac{\text{Total comments}}{\text{Number of posts}}$$

$$= \frac{14379}{439}$$

= 32.75 comments on each post or 33 comments.

Although this would not be a fair representation as many posts have no comments while some have over 200.

On average it was observed that image posts had a higher number of comments than video content. Figure 11 illustrates the same.

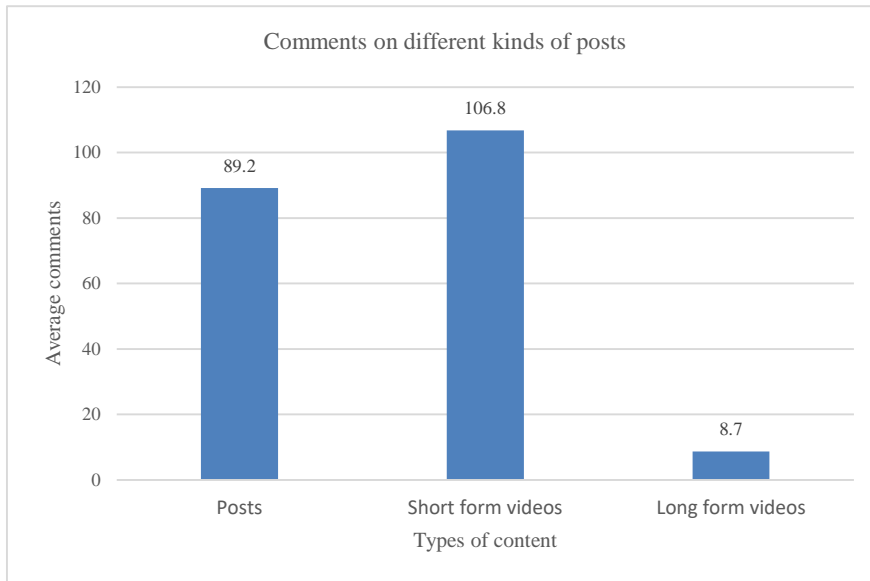


Fig 11 Comments on different kinds of posts

VII. FINDINGS

From the data analysis following key observations have been made:

1. 51% participants of the study either do not consider social media to be their preferred way of consuming news or are unsure about the same.
2. 26.7% people feel news being in the form of a sponsored post will affect their engagement with it while 22.9% are indifferent about the same.
3. Topic of news content is the most influential factor for driving engagement holding 38.13% of the vote while the news outlet comes in second at 22.95%.
4. From analysis of ThePrint we find that on average 18 stories are uploaded on Instagram.
5. Average comments on each post on ThePrint are 33 comments.
6. Short form videos are the best for driving comment based engagement.

VIII. CONCLUSION

With the rise of news media industry and social media along with research in the field it is important to have conducted this study to look at the way it impacts an individual viewer consuming news online along with their reaction and engagement. This paper has resulted in emergence of key facts which if implemented by news outlets will help boost engagement and result in them having a better understanding of their readers. For example, how important short form videos will be in boosting certain kinds of engagement. Following is a list of metrics that help drive higher levels of engagement for news content on social media (some of these are dependent upon the form of content as explained in the given example)

1. Images and short video form content.
2. Content well backed by facts and data.
3. Relevant topic
4. News outlet

From this we determine that news media organizations should focus on content tailored to the often wavering minds of social media users so as to deliver and make an impact. Relevant topic and the brand image of the news outlet also heavily impact the engagement on the content being put out. While certain individual journalists do hold a lot of influence, the data shows that it is still the topic that would drive engagement rather than journalists and ideological stances supported or disregarded in the piece. It is necessary to view the data and these findings while being aware of the fact that content creation especially high quality news content is a tedious task but marketing it through a screen on an application where the prime directive isn't news is a whole different ball game. The implications for further research in this field are holding strong. Looking at how news is impacted by artificial intelligence algorithms on these social media websites or how news is

being used on social media for misinformation are avenues which are wide open. Furthermore, revisiting and revising this research later on might also prove to be useful.

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