



Importance Of Self-Regulation In The Age Of Digital Media

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Abstract: Self-regulation is the ability to control one's behaviour, thoughts and action for the long-term goals and betterment of the society. Media has both great power and responsibilities in its hands so its freedom of expression carries along with it a lot of self-regulation as well. Diversity and difference in opinions is highly desired and welcomed in the media industry. But the ownership and limited media houses had given less chances for the diversity in news. Since the internet and the digital age, the limitation of time and space has come to an end. This has provided ample space to publish news and views of different perspective, beliefs and thoughts. But it has also brought the chances of fake news, misinformation and disinformation. In the print and electronic era, the editors, sub-editors etc. used to select, classify or choose information that they thought were worth to be included in the media. The present paper tries to understand the importance of self-regulation in the digital age.

Introduction:

The evolution of digital media has compelled us to revisit the mass communication theories and functioning of the media organisation. Journalism and mass communication is a field that experiences certain privileges like freedom of expression but with this comes the great responsibility of self-discipline and self-regulation. The print and electronic media had its developed its own system of self-regulation but with the advent of digital and social media, it has again come back into limelight. Earlier the print and electronic media was governed by the gatekeeping theory. The theory of gatekeeping can be seen in various fields of mass communication like print media, advertising, public relations, electronic media etc. In the print media, the constraint of space is responsible for filtering the news. All the news cannot find space in the newspapers and magazines. Similarly in the electronic media the time slots are limited and many of the news must be discarded, so that some of the news can get priority and focus. The media focuses on the taste of its readers and audience while filtering the news. The editors and his/her team select the news that would be published from the number of events that occur in the day. Thus, they become the gatekeeper who were responsible for providing the public the topic on which they will discuss in the public sphere. Gatekeeping is the process of selecting messages from billions of messages and filtering them so that it can be consumed by a particular audience within a specific time and space.

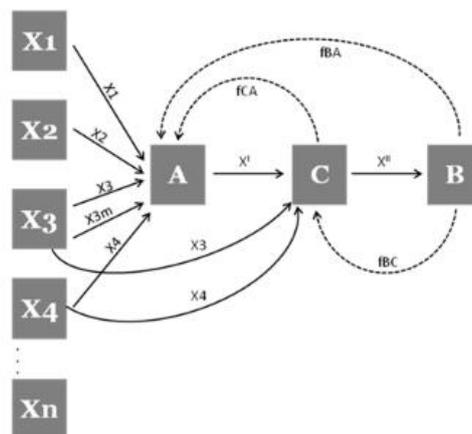
History of Gatekeeping Theory:

Gatekeeping theory is one of the original and earliest theory in the field of mass communication. The gatekeeping theory was propounded during the age of newspapers. Gatekeeping theory is understood as the control on information that can pass through a gate or filter. The term “gatekeeping” was coined by social psychologist Kurt Lewin. He was a German who came to Ohio University during the World War. He did a project to understand the psychology of public to motivate public to start eating the secondary parts of meat, as the primary part of meat were sent to the army. Kurt Lewin found that the food items that come inside the home and is served on the dining table has to pass through certain gates of decision making. He concluded that housewives or the housekeepers behave as the gatekeepers who decides which food item should be bought and what family members should eat.

David White was a contemporary to Kurt Lewin and was also a student of Wilbur Schramm. David White is credited to associate the process of Gatekeeping theory in the field of mass communication. He conducted research on a newspaper editor named “Mr. Gates” to understand the decision-making process of selection of news for the newspaper. He posited the gatekeeping process or the filtering of news was based on the subjectivity of the news editor.

Parallel research on communication was carried out by sociologist Theodore M. Newcomb. He gave the ABX model of interpersonal communication. Bruce H. Westley was the student of Newcomb. He associated with Maclean to present true complex situation of mass communication by modifying the Newcomb’s model of interpersonal communication. A research paper “A Conceptual Model for Communication Research” was published by Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. Maclean in the Journalism Quarterly in March 1957. Newcomb had explained in his theory of interpersonal Communication that when “A” is sending information to “B” about object “X”. The Westley Maclean conceptual model of communication introduced “C” as the gatekeeper who spikes some messages that “A” tries to send to “B”. The feedback flows among the participants. In the conceptual model X1, X2, X3 and X4.... —are news articles or information, Feedback (f), Clients (A), Reader or Audience (B) and Gate Keeper (c).

Westley and MacLean’s Model of Communication



Source: Westley B.H. & MacLean M.S. (1955). Retrieved: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/30216728.pdf>

Gatekeeping in the Digital Age:

The age of internet is characterized by its virtual time and space. The constraint of space and time slots in the traditional print and electronic media gave the necessity of gatekeeping but on the digital platform news from each corner can get proper treatment. The gatekeepers also choose or reject the news according to the interest and preference of their readers and audience. The interest and online consumption of news is easy to monitor and thus through we are provided more and more information related to our preferences on the digital

media. Thus, the preference given to the choices of audience has increased the influence of audience in the gate keeping process. The rise of online news platform has led to increase of communication channel and space to publish various types of news. Online users also have the facility to like, share and comment on the news articles, thus the feedback process has also become fast and dynamic.

Today it is seen that the difference between the journalist and the media audience, i.e., the difference between the sender and the receiver of the message have become blurred. Thus, there is a rise in various social media channels where anyone and everyone can be the sender of the message. Thus, the internet users have a virtual space to publish their voices. The best part of digital space is that it is devoid of physical and national boundaries and the voices from one corner of the society can reach to the world around. But the news, that is, published on the social media is not verified or reliable many times. The traditional news media gatekeeper used to check their sources and verify the news before publishing it. But today's fast paced and competitive media environment has encouraged the senders to publish the unverified and fake news. This has also given rise to the phenomena of viral fake news. Internet users promote various fake news as publicity stunts to make or break image of some person, party, or product.

Earlier in the age of traditional gatekeeping, the readers or the viewers can easily approach to the editors of the media house for the defamatory news or statements. But in the digital age, due to less gatekeeping- news related to defamation and fake news can easily get flooded on the social media platforms. Internet users are easily becoming prey to cyberbullying, phishing and cyber-attacks. It is very difficult to even locate the cyber attackers or the sender of the defamatory posts by the average internet users. Thus, the digital platforms have given freedom to every user to publish their message by minimizing the gatekeeping process, but it has also given rise to possibilities of fake news, viral news, cyber-attacks, cyber bullying etc.

Self-Regulation in the age of Digital Media

Self-regulation is an important aspect of the media organization. Media needs to ensure that the facts they are reporting is accurate. No factual detail should be omitted that can affect the understanding about the event. The adequate context of the event should also be provided while reporting an event. The reporting of news should be independent of opinions and partiality. The reports should always be free from plagiarism and it should never contain malice and any ill intention towards any caste, creed and society. The media should be responsible and accountable towards the society. The code of conduct and the self-regulation code apply on the digital platform as well. The development in the technology has allowed common man to use the social media platform. But it is necessary to educate and self-aware the users about their rights and responsibilities. Digital literacy is the essential part of media education. All the digital and social media users should be more aware about the latest algorithm technologies used on the digital platform that creates an illusion of filter bubble. The users are sometimes trapped in their echo chambers and belief in the similar information provided by the network that only reinforces our beliefs and thoughts.

Conclusion:

Thus, the digital platform has provided space to the internet users to speak their mind. The trend of Citizen Journalism has empowered common people to challenge the news monopoly of few business and elite groups of the society. But the digital platforms have also given rise to the viral unverified fake news. The process of gatekeeping was seen to be very subjective in the traditional news format but now the technological algorithm innovated in the digital age, also conducts the process of selection and rejection of messages, based on searches and preferences of the internet users. The algorithm can direct and recommend users to visit the content according to their past searches. This is seen as artificial and robotic form of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping process was the necessary mechanism for the traditional media but today in the age of internet, we have billions of users and senders of messages, and it is very difficult to filter these messages. Thus, today media literacy and particularly digital literacy can only empower the users to protect themselves from the cyberattacks, cyberbullying etc. and become responsible and skilled digital users.

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