

The Future of Online News Video – A UAE Perspective

Sabir Haque, MAHE Dubai Campus, United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Online Video is a crucial component of the new media landscape accounting for much of the web traffic to mainstream news organizations website and social media platforms. Most of the news organizations have been building resources over the past years raising their proficiency in handling video. Today they produce regular news headlines in video and provide live streaming using services such as Periscope and Facebook Live. However, legacy news publishers are facing intense competition from digital-native news publishers, as they both have the same goal: Getting more people to watch their video. The recent changes to Facebook ‘newsfeed’ algorithm, may worsen the fate of news publishers ahead. The study aims to understand what strategy the legacy news publishers in the UAE are employing to make compelling, shareable video content. The research involves interviewing Journalists and senior editors from the news organization in Dubai: Gulf News to examine their approach towards online news video. Analysis of the news organization performances with video news stories will help understand what the future holds for a news organization as they adapt to the new medium of storytelling including apps, going beyond newsletter, podcasts and aggregation platforms.

Keywords: Journalism, Online News Video, Social Media, Newsfeed

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Introduction

It's an exciting time for news video consumers online. At one end are the startups such as BuzzFeed, Mashable, NowThis, Upworthy and numerous few bursting into the online and social media landscape in less than a decade. On the other end, are the legacy news media organization led globally by The New York Times, The Washington Post and Network News Organization. Locally every country with a decent Internet Penetration will offer its digital readers the choice of engaging with news video produced by both ends of the spectrum. Internet Video consumption has been on the rise evident from the study by (Purcell, 2010) which estimates over 70% of all internet users watch or download online videos and 14% of them post videos themselves. The long-lasting effects of such a phenomenon were starkly evident during the Arab Spring as the success of citizen videographers bought together citizens for anti-government protests shaking the very foundation of long-standing regimes. Legacy News organization tided over the first wave of disruption in the form of news websites are now navigating through the second wave of disruption characterized by the rise of social media and video-enabled Internet (Pablo J. Boczkowski, 2004; Domingo, 2008; Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini, & Newman, 2016; Meeker & Wu, 2017).

News Organization today are increasingly affected by the interest exhibited by social media platforms such as Facebook on the perceived demand for videos and the higher advertising rates associated with it (DeVito, 2017; Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). Video Sharing site YouTube has influenced news organization's attitude towards online video while Facebook has clearly outlined the importance of video content on its NewsFeed (Plantin, Lagoze, Edwards, & Sandvig, 2018). Thus, news video today represents the intersection between editorial opportunities and higher demand for video even though the challenge is the cost of producing good video content (Zillman, 2016). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat places the video at the heart of their strategies for growth (Girod, Ericsson, Resnik, & Färber, 2002).

The pressure of the digital convergence represented by digital and multimedia journalism afflicts both newspaper and television news organization as audience for both are dwindling. Moreover, the long-standing differences in the workplace model for both journalistic sub-groups takes an interesting turn as they both intersect when producing video stories. (Mary A Bock, 2012) outlines the difference between the Newspaper and Television Journalist nature of video narratives:

Newspaper journalists are taking advantage of their temporal freedom on the web to create longer, more mimetic video stories that let the images and subjects reveal themselves. Television journalists, still slaves to the clock, continue to use the diegetic form, using direct and declarative language to tell the audience what is unfolding before it. (p.12)

For the consumers of online news video, the information acquired is referred to as "getting there" and "being there." Reading an online news story is considered as "getting there," and watching an accompanying video is considered "being there." (Wise, Bolls, & Schaefer, 2008). In convergence journalism, attached video to a written piece will bring the readers closer to the story and due to its 'shareability' (Harcup & O'Neill, 2016) which denotes the likelihood of that story

being shared on social media platforms brings us into the discussion of the new means of news delivery and consumption.

Social Media platforms and news publishers are more enmeshed than ever before. Pre-dominance of social media witnessed different media competing for news delivery, but nowadays news produced in one medium would get distributed and shared across mediums. It's a common practice today as a video clip delivered by television broadcasters will be available on its podcast station, website and its numerous social media platforms. Digital technology drives the convergence of various media forms (Friedberg, 2002).

Since Facebook Live became widely available in 2016, news organizations have been experimenting with the social media network live stream option to draw audiences to their Facebook page. Since the Facebook algorithm gives more emphasis to live streaming, it's an opportunity for news organizations to bring in the broader audience – which is another incentive for publishers to maximize their reach. Social Media platform offering live streaming option is very alluring since it requires only a smartphone with internet capability and the app (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). What used to be a complex technical feat, requiring a broadcast camera, satellite uplink is today reduced to just tapping an app and going live. The result is a brand-new world of video broadcast that challenges the visual narrative of eyewitness accounts within and outside the domain of journalism. Once passive witnesses can now become active witnesses providing journalists to amplify an event and reach out to live audiences (Zelizer, 2007). Mobile technology has transformed journalistic work sparking a new mode of newsgathering where a journalist can record and deliver stories from the field instantaneously (Jeske, Briggs, & Coventry, 2016). Visual can increase engagement which is often the primary objective of news publishers. Facebook says live videos generate ten times more comment than regular ones. News publishers are progressively pushing live videos to their subscribers. Audience led form of journalism is by no means a new phenomenon anymore, but posting live videos on social media platform has made one-touch publishing a regular feature of the contemporary media environment. It creates a narrative string of live documentation, and due to its social circulation, the issue is picked up by a news organization, which in turn leads to further social conversation. Live Video is driving news creating a cycle of social media videos leading to news publisher's media coverage of the event or issue generating heightened public awareness (Tang, Venolia, & Inkpen, 2016). Facebook has spent more than 50 million dollars in 2016 paying publishers and celebrities to create a LIVE video on the social network. These deals make sense for TV studio and movie houses which already make long-form videos for TV, but it's unclear if digital publishers will take the bait. Such moves by social media platform raise the question on behalf of news publishers if they have enough staff to create live videos and how much they are ready to scale such efforts (Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2018).

The question of ethics plagues the social media network like Facebook, Google and Twitter has faced the ire of regulatory bodies on 'Fake News' and online privacy. Social Media Platforms do not adhere to the ethics considered sacrosanct by Journalist. Numerous ethical lapses were exposed in 2017-18. Expecting the regular Facebook user as they go live do not see themselves as journalists nor should they be supposed to be. Such unbridled view of the world begs us to become voyeurs. As

live streaming videos enhance our experience of the world, they also tend to trade in the ugly and profane.

Although Facebook as repeatedly clarified how it perceived its role in the news creation process and denied its position as a media company. It's embarking on various journalism projects as critics suggest such moves as cynical efforts on damage control.

It's imperative to understand how online news video has: 1) Redefined Legacy News Publishers approach towards video content creation. 2) Enabling the production, distribution of video content freed up by affordable hardware and connectivity. 3) Strengthening online and social media advertising revenue in an otherwise challenging business environment. 4) Journalistic consideration as the intersection of newspaper and television storytelling creates new challenges for convergence reporting.

Literature Review

The study of the digitization of news and its implications for journalist and the business of news creation in the 1980s and 1990s mostly considered news production and distribution practices. The changing nature of the newsroom due to its digital editions was documented by (P. J. Boczkowski, 2002) while (Domingo, Quandt, Heinonnen, Singer, & Vujnovic, 2008) investigated into the evolving journalistic culture. From the initial protectionism of the print version of the newspaper to the 'fear-driven' changes to the newsroom, the publishers engaged with the digital media and negotiated its interface with social media. As online media made way for social media, smart devices dominated by the platform such as Facebook and Google took up a large share of advertising and attention. Studies of (Deuze, 2004; Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007; Maxwell & Miller, 2011; Nguyen, 2008) provided the grounds of adaptation seen across legacy media publishers and evolution of journalistic values on social media platforms. (Bock, 2011; Mary Angela Bock, 2012) investigates the work practices of video journalist and how they operate for both broadcasters and websites. The way news organizations started producing video content and newsroom grappled with the task of uploading videos online, and its various challenges are well documented. While the difficulties of identifying news stories and letting its consumers also influence the decision-making process provided the continuing changes within the digital context of the media discourse (Doyle, 2015; Schifferes et al., 2014). The 'one-man band' band of multimedia journalist as termed by (Bock, 2011) faces much resistance in the newsroom as the solo journalist would handle multiple job roles juggling various responsibilities for multi-platform submission.

News Video and the its access pattern was analyzed by (Acharya, Smith, & Parnes, 1999) when its reception was not widely accepted as today. They observed cyclic access pattern as video watching activity differs between weekends and weekdays. News Video was traditionally within the domain of Television news, with its emphasis on real-time programming, dramatic presentation with reporters on the ground. It contrasted with the textual class of television journalists (Hallin & Gitlin, 1994; McManus, 1994; Singer, 2004) as the adoption of video technology in the print news organization activates tension to the professional identity of a newspaper

journalist. The hiring of videographers in the legacy news organization is a regular feature, and the demand for a variety of skills associated with convergence journalism is observed (Hoffman, 2013; Pincus, Wojcieszak, & Boomgarden, 2017). Convergence is observed when a journalist can move freely between print, television, print and internet outlets and can fulfill the requirement of the complex media environment. The concept of convergence is a precursor to the various assumptions made on the future of journalism industry (Klinenberg, 2005). The term used for the unification of the various news making process into one unit: “convergence-continuum.” It’s also included the new form of distribution of news which provides marketing, sales, and cross-promotion (Deuze, 2004).

Facebook’s algorithm has come under much criticism for the lack of transparency. Video get priority over other forms of media, and it’s been well documented as part of Facebook’s admission (Kant & Xu, 2016). News publishers are forced to change their social media strategy as it gets constantly shaped by the platform companies (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018). The focus on video by news publishers is driven by the fact that over the years, there has been a significant increase in the consumption of online videos. Video on Demand services is threatening the traditional domain of Network Television. The success of Netflix at the cost of conventional TV Network is an excellent example of how video-on-demand services and video sharing websites will dominate the future (Allen, Feils, & Disbrow, 2014). None of the video-on-demand or social media platform focuses on news content. Most of the growth in the online videos are limited to third-party social media platforms. As per (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2016) study, a majority of the consumers still prefer text over video. Be it video or writing; the news publishers need to maintain a strong presence on social media, as it is increasingly the place where they can distribute content and engage with their readers. Based on the discussion on news consumption so far, we ask:

RQ1: Do the online readers prefer video over text when it comes to news consumption on social media platforms?

RQ2: Use of the news portal and social media platform to deal with Breaking News Situations.

RQ3: What is the investment on workforce and resources in the news video production and how is it energizing the digital advertising for the news publisher

RQ4: How has Facebook Live or similar services helped to increase the engagement with readers? Has it redefined their role and function of their journalist?

RQ5: What are the future strategies to deal with augmented reality and 360-degree immersive video?

Methodology

To understand the way news video became a part of legacy news organizations in the UAE, Gulf News is naturally the first choice for being the most widely circulated and most widely followed news portal in the UAE. The selection of the team members from Gulf News was based on a detailed discussion with senior editors of the news

outlet. Based on their recommendations, the team involved with the news video creation process and social media curation were contacted for an in-depth interview. The interviewing process is believed to be the most effective as established by (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) where a journalist is good subjects for an in-depth interview, the study conducted eight in-depth interviews with new video producers, editors, social media managers and journalists who closely work with the social media team. Two of the journalist use to work with Gulf News/Khaleej Times and now work with digital-only news outlets operating from Dubai. The author's initial goal was to interview 15 to 20 news personnel from Gulf News and Khaleej Times put together. The number is typical for this type of qualitative research as evident from previous studies. (Besley & McComas, 2007; Besley & Roberts, 2010). After five weeks of pursuit for approval from Khaleej Times, and numerous mail request, the permission from the Managing Editor, didn't come by. The interviews of senior editors in the study are limited to Gulf News alone.

The interviews began with semi-structured questions relating to opportunities and challenges of the news production process, specific incidents of Breaking news and how the staff dealt with the situations; questions on investment and advertising revenue was only discussed with senior editors; specific questions on video technology was aimed at new video producers only; while reporters were quizzed on the newsroom structure and practices on ground.

The interviews were conducted by telephone between August 2018 and October 2018 by the author. Each conversation began with an introduction and relevance of the study for journalist and video producers on the ground. Next, the author proceeded with the semi-structured questions, which was shared with the participants beforehand, followed by a probing question leading to an in-depth discussion on the studies primary objectives. Each interview ranged between 30 to 45 minutes. The Question development was based on the literature review and was modified for a UAE perspective relating to the news routines of journalists.

The audio recording of the interview was transcribed. The transcription removed all personal identifiers, and the questions were used for the codebook development. One interview text was used to assign codes to a section initially, modifying and adding codes as the process went on. The process got completed with two additional interviews from each group (editors/reporters/video producers) before finalizing the codebook. Relations were identified between the codes and emerging themes revealing the similarities and differences in the data (Tanner, Forde, Besley, & Weir, 2012).

Findings And Discussions

It's imperative for a news organization to achieve "economics of multiformity," as (Doyle, 2002) explains the cross-media expansion so that the same content can be shared through a "common distribution infrastructure." It will enable organizational and technical amalgamation of the newsroom where a multi-skilled journalist can help expand the newsroom capabilities for new media technologies. A convergence news editor talked about the massive operation in 2007-08 when the entire Gulf Newsprint and digital operations came under one roof.

We pushed digital first. So, from web first, we pushed digital first. We brought in obviously web stories that went straight online, and we brought in videos. So, there was that significant addition. Moreover, then we were among, and I think we would probably be safe to say, we had the first readers desk. We did reader journalism. So, our readers were like our journalist. A fire broke, or there was an incident, they would send us pictures, they would send us tip-offs.

During Media Convergence, Video Journalism is a natural outgrowth; it is seen to be product and manifestation of technology, organization, and presentation. We have seen newspapers and radio stations publishing videos on their websites. Videojournalist were involved in the newsgathering process. These types of solo journalism were also prevalent in the TV market as well (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013). The video producer we interviewed from Gulf News broke down the entire production workflow they follow. A majority of the videos they do supplement the material collected by the journalist on the ground. As the journalist is asking the questions to the interviewee, the video producer will film the interview and then edit it for a specific video story. We have come a long way from the point of view where online journalism was considered as a medium where already produced content is re-aired (Thornton & Keith, 2009). The narrative used for news videos online is a fresh product of original content for the web. The video producer states that Gulf News has aggressively invested in online news videos. These early forays into digital video certainly place the entire social media team at an advantage, as their technical capability increases opening them up for more experimentation such as Live TV.

A Senior Editor in the social media team of Gulf News describes how they wanted to go beyond their regular news bulletin:

And then along the way, we also saw how consumption was changing, so we introduced the Facebook live news broadcast. Earlier we used to do the same kind of show, but it was related to a specific story only. It would be a big story, breaking story that is happening, the story will explain what is happening. However, now along with that what we've done is we've started to do daily broadcast, based on the news selection of the day.

On the primary research question of online audience preferring 'text over the video'; the video producer believes that live broadcast capability enhanced their engagement and enabled them to give real-time breaking news. The video producer further discussed which videos are most widely viewed in the UAE:

In terms of what the demand from the consumer would be, we find that the most relevant and sort of viewed videos tend to be things that focus on local stories that will apply to people directly. It could be something as sort of as innocuous as how much it rained today to specific government policy changes in the UAE. So, local stories tend to be the stuff that people want to see more, and in the video medium, we can manage to explain that with visuals which help a lot.

The turnaround time for covering breaking news is remarkable. A senior editor provided data which points to the fact that 80 percent of their traffic to the website comes from users logged in via their mobile phones. Their top stories featured in the homepage of Gulf News website does exceptionally well. A story which may not do well in the website will do well in the social media channels. It will do better on Facebook or YouTube. Although YouTube videos are regarded to be a very unpredictable platform, it will do exceptionally well or poorly, and it depends on the story. Local Stories are the most viewed. Second, is the news on celebrity which is part of their tabloid section.

‘Disaggregation’ is the result of the rise of social media platform. To put it squarely, it is the process placing various topics such as economics, to sport, to politics, fashion, entertainment, arts, and even classified advertising as a niche segment rather than under a collective one.

The most remarkable thing about social media, as the social media editor believes from Gulf News is the way Journalism has the power to unite across the platforms. Moreover, how a story in the Print Editions gets a life of its own in the social media platforms. As compared to just the print editions, the effectiveness of its social media platform in doing something actionable is remarkable. She shares an incident which happened two years ago to illustrate:

We had a print story, about a man losing his son near the Mushrif Park during the New York Celebration. He called a print Journalist with Gulf news who filed a story immediately the next day. The story was shared on social media as well. One of the Gulf News readers, who was taking a metro, saw a boy sitting on a bench near the metro station. He left a message on Gulf News social media pages. The commuter mentioned, he will return to tend to the boy but had to first go to his office and return after informing his supervisors. The Gulf News team asked the commuter to take a picture of the boy to ensure that the lead was authentic. The reporter then spoke to the Father and after confirmation, asked people on social media who were around the metro station to help the boy out. You would not believe the amount of many people who went out there, looked for him, actually got him food and spent time in his company so that he would wait. We managed actually to reunite him with his son. To me, that was the power of journalism.

Just like the connectivity with people, social media has also upended the way advertisers spend on print publications. Publications here in the UAE can’t ignore these trend. The market fragmentation has driven the traditional advertisers from print towards online (Blom, Morgan, Zube, & Bowe, 2014). After speaking to reporters who has worked with both Khaleej Times and Gulf News over the last decade, they confirmed that both the publication took on Digital Advertising many years ago and had been slowly harnessing its capability as today its evident how the entire action is gradually moving from print to social media in terms of its advertising revenue. The video producers of Gulf News was enquired about monetizing videos on social media:

Yes, we do, we try to monetize all content on social media except certain sensitive subjects we publish. This has been continuing for over four to five years now. As compared to Google, Facebook monetization works; differently, I would say less efficiently at the moment. However, it's been working out great for us since the time we entered this space of advertising.

News Organization has been wary of Facebook news algorithm as it would influence the way most Facebook users see the news. The publisher must grapple with the uncertainty surrounded due to non-transparency from Facebook on the algorithm it employs. However, Gulf News Social Media Team is confident on how they handled this recent transition. Also, it clarified on how stories are filed by reporters across the platforms and its print editions. Gulf News Social Media Editor explains:

We do a Facebook live coverage of an event like the recently organized Asia Cup, which is done in tandem with the website. Some reporters are also filing video clips and photographs. Along with that, he or she is also filing for Facebook, which we then use to direct traffic back to the website. So, it's all part of a complete digital package. Thus, the feeds are sustaining pretty well and, when the algorithm shifted in Facebook we did see a dip, but now we are bringing it back up because of the things that we are doing, primarily engaging. If the content is engaging, you manage to go back up on the algorithm. Also, it's all organic, it's not paid for, which I think is necessary because we can only spend and boost so much. Unless it is organic, you are not going to be able to stay.

Both Gulf News and Khaleej Times broadcast live news bulletin on their Facebook Page, and during significant event coverage, reporters of both the publication upload short reporter bytes giving an update on the event. Based on their observation of the change in consumption pattern of its readers online, Gulf News introduced the daily Facebook Live News Bulletin.

Based on the interviews with editor, reporters and video producer, it's evident that news publishers in the UAE seem to be highly effective in scrutinizing their operations and the transition from print editions to online including social media has been successful. The implementation of technological changes in the newsroom and their interface with video technology has maintained the journalism's occupation ideologies for each form of media. As the industry stares at the third round of disruption through augmented reality, virtual reality and artificial intelligence, a senior editor from Gulf News is hopeful of the future, *'...as it changes, we will be there, as technology changes and technology advances, we will adopt and embrace, the technology of the day...'*

The same technological developments have given birth to alternative digital-only news publishers in the UAE such as Emirates 24x7 and Arabian Business. Gulf News and Khaleej Times need to ensure are that they understand the demands of the millennials, as they embrace a news video which is creating its unique narrative forms taking a break from the news formats of Broadcast media. As (Deuze & Bardoel, 2001) predicted on how implementation of innovative tools will change journalism forever. Since the move towards the production of the online video is pushed actively by social media platforms, the news publishers have adopted a far

more active approach to online video. If the leading mainstream news organization in the UAE is building their infrastructure and workforce to deal with this change and pursuing these new opportunities until it becomes mainstream. We can bet on what we see as a promising but an uncertain future when it comes to news video online.

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Contact email: sabir@manipaldubai.com