

**Social media and
journalistic practice: A
case study of Twitter in
Kashmir**

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Abstract

This article studies the use of Twitter as a newsgathering and news sharing tool by journalists in the region of Kashmir. The recent spurt in the number of Twitter accounts of media organizations and individual journalists from the region suggests their increasing reliance on Twitter as a source of news while connecting and integrating them with wider journalistic processes and practices at national and global levels. Although such networked news production and news dissemination can be enabling, especially given that the region is embroiled in perpetual conflict and marred by clampdowns on media freedom, the fear that it compromises journalistic principle of fact checking and verification of truth takes away from the euphoria of such a technological transformation of the profession. Interviews with journalists show that they embrace Twitter more for ease of work and to expand their sphere of influence than to improve the quality of their reportage.

Keywords

Journalism, Kashmir, newsgathering, social media, Twitter

Introduction

The proliferation of social media networks and micro-blogging platforms powered by Web 2.0 has changed the face of communication systems and

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processes in the modern world. This development has ushered in what Castells (2010) calls a network society, the key features of which are multiplicity of communication patterns and increasing virtuality and interactivity. While these new communication patterns have impacted the whole sphere of society (Fuchs, 2008), they are also, in significant ways, changing the journalistic field and its practice. Pavlik (2000) identifies four levels at which technology influences journalism. The first and foremost is how journalists do their work in relation with technology followed by the changes in content of news, structure of newsroom, and the shifting relationship between or among news organizations, journalists and their many publics.

Globally, a growing body of scholarship interrogates the impact of social media on journalism. But, as Chattopadhyay (2012) remarks, scant attention has been paid to the Indian subcontinent within this wider scholarship. Despite his critique, much of the scholarship on the use and impact of social media in the Indian context has been relegated to election studies, mostly after the 2009 General Election, and if at all, it has looked at the political centres of news production and seldom interrogated the incorporation of social media in journalistic routines and practices in the peripheral regions of the country. This article explores the use of Twitter as a news gathering and news sharing tool by journalists in Kashmir where an intractable political conflict has been raging for decades placing the region in an anomalous position with regard to the nature of journalism practiced, given the lack of journalistic freedoms in the region besides its topographical isolation that makes access to the field an issue for reporters. Curiously, given the nature of the conflict that has become definite of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (henceforth J&K), it remains one of the most newsworthy regions of the country from the point of salient news thematics having to do with national security, insurgency, India's problematic relations with its neighbour Pakistan and the State's unique arrangement of autonomy at the time of its accession to the Indian Union through enactment (and their revocation recently) of articles 35A and 370.

Such political intransigence notwithstanding, the region's cultural difference further makes it untenable to extend the larger generalisations about journalism and its practice in India to be extended to the scribes in

J&K. To that extent, the region has evolved a media landscape that has been marred with poor growth of print and electronic news media given its political volatility. However, points of convergence are found when it comes to the integration of social media especially Twitter in journalistic work culture and practice in the last few years. This, therefore, not only presents an interesting phenomenon that deserves scholarly attention but also points to social media's ability to create networks beyond geographical, cultural, political differences, something that legacy media could not fully transcend or bring down.

The article therefore argues that the microblogging platforms have helped journalists connect and integrate with the wider journalistic processes and communities outside of their immediate surroundings and this in effect helps to standardise their own practices which were until now bound to small town solidarities, regional sentiments and provincial readership. Besides, such a study acquires significance in view of the growing distrust of profit-maximising mainstream media in India given their dubious ownership and financing patterns (Saeed, 2015) that potentially empowers Twitter as a media watchdog (Chadha, 2012). Furthermore, this article supports the overall thesis that digital technological acceleration has transformed Indian journalism most visibly through social media (Chattopadhyay, 2012). In the context of 'India Against Corruption' movement, Rodrigues (2014) shows how its mainstream media coverage was influenced by social media which set the agenda for the otherwise powerful television channels and newspapers which were forced to follow the cues from the web.

Literature Review

The application of social media networks and micro-blogging platforms in journalistic practice has garnered widespread scholarly attention in the Western academia (Hermida, 2012; Lasorsa et al, 2012; Paulussen & Harder, 2014; Stassen, 2010). Various existing frameworks—among others, for instance, field theory, mediatization, and new literacy—have been applied to investigate the use of Twitter by journalists and the phenomenon's implications on the journalistic practice (Barnard, 2014, 2017; Hermida, 2012). Although limited in approach and methodology, these studies contribute not only in so far that they inform our

understanding of how journalism embraces newer technological tools but also how these tools help to evolve new journalistic practices that are then slowly internalized in the doxa of the journalistic field (Barnard, 2014). Taken together, this new corpus of scholarship points to the significant shift in journalism studies from the vantage point of forms of news 'produced' through networked platforms that combine broadcast and oral traditions and take on an affective form which is hybrid and ambient and provides liminal layers to storytelling (Papacharissi, 2015). Furthermore, the engagement with social media has been mostly restricted to North-Atlantic temporalities centred around geo-political locations in the developed societies of the West, the very rationale and method of which have limited applicability in countries in the Global South. Murthy (2012) for instance, pitching for alternative understanding of Twitter beyond a data centric approach and quantitative methods, takes a socio-historical recourse to understand the Twitter phenomenon as informed by the insights of Erving Goffman and other framing analysis theorists. Indeed, it could be argued that a more serious and diverse engagement with the social media is still to evolve from its initial techno-centric approaches as scholars across the globe seek to comprehend the myriad sociological and epistemological transformations that the social media have forged. To that extent, Hermida (2010) meticulously describes how social media has rendered journalism 'ambient', 'always on', fragmented and omnipresent.

In the context of the United Kingdom, Vis (2013) studies the use of Twitter by journalists as an effective reporting tool. Vis observes that during crisis situations, "emerging journalistic practices highlight journalism as a process flowing and developing between tweets, live blogs, other online content and print" (Vis, 2013, p. 43). Twitter is "affecting the way news is gathered, disseminated, and consumed" but more significantly it is subverting the journalistic claim to holding a monopoly over every day public knowledge production as well as jurisdiction over verifying the truth, accuracy and validity of news events (Hermida, 2012, p. 2). The role of Twitter as a source of news has been further investigated from the point of its routinization in the newsroom and normalization by the mainstream media (Moon & Hadley, 2014). Critical engagements with Twitter interestingly demonstrate its

differential usage by Dutch and British tabloids and broadsheets and how it has a telling impact on the balance of power between journalists and sources (Broersma & Graham, 2013). In the context of major media outlets in the U.S., Moon and Hadley (2014) found that in the selected sample period from September 2010 to August 2011, a total of 946 newspaper stories and TV news segments used Twitter as a news source. They evinced that the seven sampled media outlets published or aired 11.2 stories per day using information from Twitter and of that, *CNN* cited Twitter most frequently (389 segments) in the sample period followed by *The New York Times* (238 stories) and *Washington Post* (113 stories).

Drawing on theoretical insights of Kovach and Rosenstiel (2010), Artwick (2013) shows how journalists use Twitter to engage in 'journalism as service' by live tweeting news events and retweeting the voices of citizens while also adhering to 'conventions of product' by sharing the content produced in their newsrooms. Barnard (2017) shows how Twitter became a tool for journalists and activists to campaign for the justice of an unarmed Black teenager who was shot dead by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Barnard notes, "Twitter is well situated to lay bare the dynamics of political activism, journalism, and democracy" (2017, p. 4). In the context of India, Poell and Rajagopalan (2015) study the coming together of journalists and activists on Twitter in the aftermath of 2012 Delhi gang rape. Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012) found that during political crises, news on Twitter manifests a hybridity of old and new values. This hybridity, they surmise, is a blend of news, opinion, and emotion, packaged in such a manner that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. Papacharissi (2015) uses affect theory to define *affective news streams* as news that has been collaboratively constructed out of subjective experience, opinion, and emotion which are a product of and sustained by ambient news environments. Hedman (2014) theorises that journalists who are active on Twitter deviate from traditional professional practices, norms, and values.

Early research on Twitter has outlined rich connections between the micro-blogging platform and news (Kwak et al, 2010). Kwak et al. crawled Twitter data of 41.7 million user profiles and examined 106 million tweets. They found that the majority of topics shared on Twitter were news headlines or persistent news. Therefore, from the very

beginning Twitter came to be a platform to relay news to a widely dispersed audience. When Twitter was just a year old, Java et al (2007) conducted a study and found that micro-blogging helped people to acquire and share information. Today, besides being used by citizens as a mechanism for public accountability (Ettema, 2009), Twitter is widely used by the news industry as a content dissemination tool (Armstrong & Gao, 2010) besides becoming an essential 'tool' for journalists in their work (Ahmad, 2010). One of the most important transformations that Twitter has prompted in the field of journalism is the pace, intensity, and scale with which data, stories, information – newsworthy, and otherwise, public and private – are generated, edited, transmitted and retransmitted.

The intellectual engagement with Twitter (est. 2006) is just a decade old, although literature is fast expanding. For Hermida (2010), micro-blogging platforms are 'awareness systems' that provide journalists "with more complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication" (p. 298) which go beyond 'information and quotes from official sources' that made up a majority of news and information content within traditional journalism. This is being questioned and subverted as Twitter facilitates information from a variety of unofficial sources.

Organisations like *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Bloomberg* have established their own Twitter policies in order to bring the micro-blogging platform into the fold of established norms of conventional journalism (Hermida, 2010). It has been shown that in the wake of such pressures journalists have normalized their blogosphere by bringing it closer and in line with their established professional norms (Singer, 2005). Likewise, Lasorsa et al (2012) citing Singer (2005) show that political commentators and journalists in the United States use internet as 'a new site for old activities' (p. 20), leading to a normalizing effect. Drawing upon profiles and activities of the most followed journalists on Twitter they found out that the less elite journalists were more willing to deviate from traditional norms and practices than their elite counterparts.

Murthy observes, Twitter has become 'a space for multiple journalism' (2013, p. 52) while the micro-blogging platform possesses "the power to connect reporters, sources, as well as readers, like never before" (Hacker & Seshagiri, 2011). Broersma and Graham (2012) emphasize that minimal

resources for newsgathering and weaker economic positions are pushing newspapers to adapt information produced and supplied through social media. A consequence of this is that conventional newsgathering practices are being replaced by the desk-bound techniques of information collection online.

In view of the literature reviewed above, this article taking a phenomenological approach tries to explore the extent and nature of the use of Twitter by journalists in Kashmir and how it is influencing journalistic practice in the State.

Methodology

This article draws on in-depth interviews with journalists who are active j-tweeters (journalist-tweeters) in order to critically understand social media usage for newsgathering among journalists. Interviews were conducted to get a first-hand account from journalists on their usage of Twitter as a news source and as a platform for other work-related activities. The choice of methods adopted herein are informed by etic and emic principles of qualitative research and their operationalization which offers us an instance to understand the subject under consideration from both inside as well as outside perspectives, such that the self, here the journalist and Twitter, the technology, are taken as mutually constitutive and in complex ways are to be understood in relation to each other. As a representative sample, ten journalists were interviewed based on their presence on Twitter and the frequency of tweets. Open-ended questions were asked to determine the extent to which journalists use Twitter for news gathering, news sharing and wider conversation with online audiences.

Such a phenomenological approach can help provide insights beyond the western-centric, data-driven studies which see micro-blogging practices in developed societies as universally generalisable missing out on distinct rationalities of use. While much of the social media research is conducted through quantitative methods, interviews have been adopted here to emphasize the need towards a more hermeneutic understanding of Twitter.

Findings and Discussion

To begin with, the media ecology in J&K is distinct having been shaped by specific political milieus that have informed journalistic culture in the region in ways very different from the rest of India. The newspaper industry in J&K is nearly a century old. The first newspapers emerged during the late nineteenth century when J&K was a princely state under the British Crown. Although their number was limited because of stringent policies of the Dogra court, newspapers began to flourish during the decade of 1930s concomitant to the socio-political awakening among the local population (Taseer, 1988). After J&K was subsumed within the Indian Union in 1947, the number of newspapers increased slowly. Over the decades, the newspapers industry in J&K has been burgeoning. As Table 1 shows, their number increased from 66 in 1967 (RNI, 1967, pp. 204–206) to 1094 in 2018 (RNI, 2018, pp. 389–390), a staggering growth of 1557.57 percent. During 2017–2018, 23 new publications were registered in the State (See Tables 1.2 and 1.3 for the number of approved and non-approved newspapers in Kashmir and Jammu provinces by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of J&K).

Table 1:
Number of newspapers in J&K registered with Registrar of Newspapers for India till 2018

Dailies	Tri-bi weeklies	Weeklies	Fortnightlies	Monthlies	Quarterlies	Others	Annuals	Total
329	4	512	86	110	22	27	4	1094

Source: RNI (2018, pp. 389–390).

Table 1.2:
Number of approved and non-approved newspapers and magazines in Kashmir division till 2018

English	Fortnightlies	Hindi	Kashmiri	Litho	Monthly	Urdu	Total
43	3	1	4	11	5	104	171

Source: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of J&K

Table 1.3:
Number of approved and non-approved newspapers and magazines in Jammu division till 2018

English	Hindi	Punjabi	Dogri	Urdu	Total
84	38	2	3	74	201

Source: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of J&K

Despite such a growth trajectory on the one hand, journalists work in “precarious situations” with low wages, no job security, and life or risk insurance on the other (Murthy, 2017). The reason for this is that journalism has not yet become institutionalized as a profession in J&K and there is no uniformity among organizations on a formal structure for recruitment, promotions and benefits (Murthy, 2017). Newspapers are less likely to invest in in-depth newsgathering operations, besides, a lack of support from employers often forces reporters to cut down on their news gathering visits and take recourse to social media to gather information instantaneously from afar. Murthy’s (2017) situation report makes explicit a range of such challenges facing journalists in Kashmir. As she reflects, journalists’ salaries are poor and new entrants in the field are often forced to work on a meager amount. Atop of these challenges, saturation of the relatively small and limited job market is pushing new Journalism graduates to the realm of the digital, which helps them connect and integrate with wider journalistic processes. It is in this vein that Murthy observes that new technologies and mobile telephony are changing the way news is gathered and disseminated.

The shift to the digital is in part attributable to the general trend of growth in the number of wireless subscribers which increased by 29.56 percent during 2014 to 2018. As Table 2 shows, Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio, and Vodafone are the major telecom operators in the region in the wireless category. The government-operated Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has not registered any increase in subscription over the last five years perhaps because it is the private players who have tapped on the vast market despite BSNL being the only operator in the wireline category. However, the overall number of wireline subscribers has decreased by 32.68 percent (See Table 3), which suggests a general shift from wireline to wireless technology.

Table 2
Wireless subscriber base in J&K since 2014

Telecom Operators	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
<i>Vodafone</i>	1,339,981	862,593	980,533	1,048,029	1,050,980
<i>Reliance Jio</i>	3,309,640	1,904,180	875,883	-----	
<i>Aircel</i>	-----	3,422,896	2,867,502	2,539,460	2,491,798
<i>Idea</i>	-----	572,422	623,267	602,415	466,419
<i>Reliance</i>	-----	726,412	949,459	849,831	749,221
<i>Bharti Airtel</i>	5,642,025	4,084,556	3,505,002	3,348,374	2,885,273
<i>BSNL</i>	1,214,265	1,548,957	1,471,105	1,252,820	1,236,863
Total	11,505,911	13,122,016	11,272,751	9,640,929	8,880,554

Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

Table 3
Wireline subscriber base in J&K since 2014

Telecom Operator	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
<i>BSNL</i>	105,329	116,807	134,171	131,649	156,472
Total	105,329	116,807	134,171	131,649	156,472

Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

Parallel to the increasing subscriber base in telephony, the number of internet subscribers in J&K has witnessed a growth rate of approximately 110.72 percent during the last five years (See Table 4). This increase can in turn be attributed to the growing number of telephone and mobile subscribers in the state which increased to 6.49 million at the end of 2018 from 3.08 million in 2014, a growth rate of 49.22 percent (See Table 5). As the number of general subscribers increases, the media sector too has become dependent on the internet, the absence of which is a handicap for journalists (Yaseen, 2017). Given the political economy of the media, particularly the spread and penetration of the telecom sector, internet is pegged to play a vital role in how journalism is imagined and practiced as also received in J&K in terms of integrating it with the larger journalistic practices both nationally and internationally so that the journalistic sphere in the State moves out of the stranglehold of its previously provincialized, ghettoized and microcosmic engagement within to opening up to stories and developments from across the world. These exchanges and conversations on social media will translate into a

different expectation from journalism in the region, especially from readers who are better informed and now have a wider choice of news consumption at their disposal. In short, it will have far reaching impact on journalistic standards and practice in Kashmir.

Table 4
Annual growth of internet subscribers (million) in J&K

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
3.08	3.49	3.02	5.02	6.49

Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

Table 4.1
Population and literacy rate of J&K

Population	Literacy
12.5 million	67.16

Source: Census of India 2011

Table 5
Telephone subscriber base in million (wireline and wireless) in J&K

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
7.78	9.04	9.77	11.41	13.24	11.61

Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

The above argument is eventually validated in tables 6 and 7 which present evidence of the growing use of Twitter by media organizations and journalists in J&K. The Twitter profiles of organizations and journalists were randomly selected to draw a representative sample to determine online presence of newspapers and journalists. Table 7 in particular alludes to the use of Twitter by journalists working for local, national and international media houses across print and television. Interestingly, a dissimilarity was observed in the Twitter usage by journalists at the three levels, i.e. local, regional and national. Those working for local and national news media organizations from Kashmir use Twitter for both the purposes: tweeting their stories, retweeting “interesting” tweets, and responding or engaging with government officials, colleagues, and other Twitter users (Mubashir Bukhari, personal interview). On the other hand, journalists working for international news outlets or wire services remain dispassionate and ‘objective’ in their tweeting so as to conform to social media guidelines laid down by their

respective organisations. They would only use Twitter to share their stories once published by their organizations. In the absence of any overt guidelines or internal directives on the use of twitter in most news media organizations in India, national and local media outlets use Twitter indiscreetly often in breach of journalistic norm of objectivity besides feeding into usual fears of backing information which they have themselves not verified or investigated first hand. Hermida (2010) refers to this when arguing that national and local media organizations must draft Twitter policies akin to international media organisations in order to bring the microblogging platform into the fold of established norms of conventional journalism.

Table 6
A list of randomly selected newspapers with Twitter follower count and year of joining

Newspaper	Handle	Followers	Year of joining
<i>Greater Kashmir</i>	@GreaterKashmir	127,035	May 2012
<i>Kashmir Monitor</i>	@Kashmir_Monitor	43,471	October 2009
<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@RisingKashmir	96,927	August 2010
<i>Kashmir Horizon</i>	@KashmirHorizon	2,926	March 2011
<i>Kashmir Uzma</i>	@kashmiruzma	5,921	May 2013
<i>Kashmir Observer</i>	@kashmirobsviewer	7,162	August 2009
<i>Kashmir Mirror</i>	@Kashmir_Mirror	18,692	September 2010
<i>Kashmir Times</i>	@times_kashmir	11	February 2018
<i>Daily Excelsior</i>	@DailyExcelsior1	10,323	May 2014
<i>Kashmir News Service</i>	@KNSKashmir	8450	September 2011
<i>Free Press Kashmir</i>	@FreePressK	9150	March 2012
<i>Kashmir Media Watch</i>	@KMWnews	10,372	April 2011
<i>Kashmir News</i>	@kashmir_news	13,101	August 2010

Source: Twitter; table drawn by the author

Table 7
Some well-known journalists in J&K with their Twitter followers' count and year of joining

Journalist	Affiliation	Handle	Followers	Year of joining
Shujaat Bukhari	<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@bukharishujaat	54,382	November 2009
Bismah Malik	<i>IB Times</i>	@bismahmalik	8,381	March 2010
Prabodh	<i>Kashmir</i>	@prabodhjamwal	210	April 2009

Jamwal	<i>Times</i>			
Aliya Bashir	<i>Global Press Journal</i>	@AliyaBashir	352	June 2015
Wasim Khalid	<i>Kashmir Reader</i>	@WasemKhalid	3,546	October 2013
Moazum Mohammad	<i>India Today</i>	@moazum_m	2716	April 2012
Ishfaq Tantry	<i>Tribune</i>	@ishfaqtantry	942	March 2011
Majid Jahangir	<i>Tribune</i>	@Majid_Jahangir7	6,560	July 2012
Bashir Manzar	<i>Kashmir Images</i>	@bashirmanzar	5,310	February 2011
Raihana Maqbool	<i>Global Press Journal</i>	@RaihanaMaqbool	588	June 2011
Mir Ehsan	<i>Hindustan Times</i>	@mirehsankhaliq	1,709	April 2010
Ahmed Ali Fayyaz	Freelance	@ahmedalifayyaz	17,031	September 2009
Nazir Ganaie	<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@Nazirkashmiri	3,270	November 2010
Khursheed Wani	<i>ETV Bharat</i>	@ksheed1	3,203	February 2011
Fahad Shah	<i>The Kashmir Walla</i>	Fahad Shah	8428	January 2010
Sheikh Qayoom	<i>IANS</i>	@SheikhQayoom	2,334	February 2011
Aijaz Hussain	<i>The Associated Press</i>	@hussain_ajaz	3000	May 2011
Inayat Jehangir	<i>PTI</i>	@Jehangir_Inayat	3,389	August 2009
Mir Shafat	<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@SahirShafat	298	July 2013
Javid Ahmad	<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@javidahmad952	229	March 2011
Mansoor Peer	<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@PeerzadaMansoor	620	June 2014

Faisul Yaseen	<i>Rising Kashmir</i>	@FaisulYaseen	1,326	September 2010
Yusuf Jameel	<i>Asian Age</i>	@jameelyusuf	20,533	March 2010
Parvaiz Bukhari	Freelance	@parvaizbukhari	5,939	June 2009
Ishfaq-ul-Hassan	<i>DNA</i>	@ishfaq72	262	June 2009
Altaf Hussain	Freelance	@ayhussain	364	June 2013
Naseer Ganai	<i>Outlook</i>	@naseerganai	7,626	February 2011
Mufti Islah	<i>CNN News 18</i>	@islahmufti	25,533	February 2011
Fayaz Bukhari	<i>Reuters</i>	@fayazbukhari	412	February 2011
Gowhar Geelani	Freelance	@gowhargeelani	13,260	April 2009
Manzoor ul Hassan	<i>Kashmir Reader</i>	@vamik	961	April 2010
Zulfikar Majid	<i>Deccan Herald</i>	@zulfikarmajid	249	February 2011
Shuja ul haq	<i>India Today</i>	@ShujaUH	29,191	January 2011

Source: Twitter; table drawn by the author

As Tables 6 and 7 suggest, a spurt in journalists joining Twitter, especially since 2011, and also an increase in their followers is evident. Interviews with journalists selected for the study revealed that they used Twitter to exert their identity and influence by demonstrating their official affiliation, as well as to establish their competence in a profession that demands a 24/7 work culture, to appear to always be clued on or to get a head start. Competition within and outside the organization in the digital age of journalism they believed was mapped against the time axis where dexterity and quickness were most rewarded traits and feted by the management and editors. These compulsions arising from changed professional goalposts, journalists felt, forced them to take to Twitter. However, they said that often the reasons went beyond the four walls of their newsrooms as it connected them to larger public(s) outside. Table 7

shows that Shuja ul Haq of *India Today*, followed by Mufti Islah of *CNN News 18* and then Yusuf Jameel of *Asian Age*, all three working with media organizations outside the State, have a large number of followers (more than 20,000) and hence wield maximum online clout within the journalistic community in the region. This observation is consistent with Gul and Islam (2013) whose study on the adoption of social media by English-language newspapers in Kashmir points to newspapers' increasingly taking the help of social media sites to share their content to a wider audience online. According to their findings, among the newspapers that have an online presence, 36.2 percent have adopted social media technologies. On the other hand, journalists use Twitter to get updates on breaking news events. To that end, they use hashtags to link to an increasing number of Twitter users who live-tweet events in real time, which journalists follow.

However, as the table 7 evinces, no journalist compares with the popularity which Shujaat Bukhari, the founding editor of *Rising Kashmir*, enjoyed until his assassination.

A critical analysis of the Twitter accounts of the selected journalists shows that they follow politicians, government officials and offices, and colleagues, besides following Twitter accounts of local news agencies and web portals to keep abreast with the latest news and information akin to how beat reporters make a diurnal check of the latest happenings. As one female freelance journalist remarked: "Twitter offers me a lot of tips that I turn into stories. It helps me connect to sources that I would otherwise never be able to meet."

A wide variety of reflections emerge from the newsroom ethnographies and in-depth interviews towards a phenomenological understanding of the use of Twitter as a news gathering and news sharing tool by journalists in Kashmir. While journalists routinely use social media as an aid in their daily routine work, there are patterns of use which are distinct from other contexts of use outside the region, some of which are discussed below.

A major outcome of the adoption of Twitter as a news gathering and news sharing tool by journalists has resulted in their reinvention of the self (to rephrase Ellerman [2007] who talks of 'inventing the self') as the microblogging platform offers them a medium towards assertion of their

individual identities. In the words of journalist Wasim Khalid, an active j-tweeter:

“It is not always that Twitter shapes our reporting, but it gives freedom to make opinionated statements. And also, whatever the mainstream media ignores, the alternate mediums can come handy. That is why people resort to alternate mediums to get voices heard. Since Kashmir is a conflict zone, there are too many interest groups and so is the media, which is constantly under pressure. Alternate media have no such pressures” (Personal interview).

It was observed from the sampled accounts that the use of Twitter has also resulted in reduced reliance on official sources which earlier formed a major source of information for newspapers. Newspapers’ reliance on official sources is a rather settled subject in the literature on news studies. For instance, Gans (1979), Hall et al (1978) and Schudson (1982) variously demonstrate in the context of American news production that journalists seldom question the political and social hierarchies instead serve to reinforce and sustain it by paying obeisance to those in power by giving them privileged position in news reports. So, it is the government and other influential sources that set the terms of reference to understand an event or policy and media lends them unabashed legitimacy at the cost of criticality and plurality of information which in turn is predicated on diversity of sourcing within a ‘balanced’ news story. With the arrival of social networking sites, as Hacker and Seshagiri (2011) observe, journalists have been able to connect with a wide variety of sources and readers which might help to offer alternate views and opinions. While this is a global trend, a similar development has taken place in Kashmir albeit at a slower pace where journalists are actively reimagining the conventional notions of news sources and their own relationship with them. Today, a reporter in a newsroom in Srinagar does not skim through his diary for his field notes but scrolls down the Twitter home screen to find latest and relevant updates that s/he could turn into a news story. The consequences of such a trend for journalism have resulted in a lively literature that is questioning the very fundamentals of how journalism is understood and practised, its scope and especially its ability to tell the truth.

A majority of journalists interviewed for this article reportedly opened their Twitter accounts during and after 2010 (as Table 7 reveals), the year that witnessed a series of violent mass demonstrations in the Middle East in what is popularly called the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring ushered in new practices in journalism as bloggers used social media networks to portray the conflict in the Middle East. As Rodrigues (2014) suggests, it sparked among activists in India a desire for socio-political change inspired by the success of anti-government protests in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and other countries in the Middle East and the role that social media played in these popular uprisings and political mobilizations. It has been contended that news on Twitter manifests a hybridity of old and new values particularly during moments of political crises (Papacharissi & Oliveira, 2012). This hybridity is a blend of news, opinion, and emotion, packaged in such a manner that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. Papacharissi and Oliveira (2012) call this form affective news, a form of content that is distinctive and produced by networked publics. Twitter became a household name in Kashmir during periods of the civilian unrest in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (Mohammad, 2017). During these phases of socio-political turmoil, journalists and activists came to create, to use the term coined by Hermida (2010) an 'ambient environment' to keep the conversation and news flowing to the public online.

Furthermore, it has been observed that affective news on social media heightens when mainstream media are restricted to operate. In the context of Kashmir, affective news assumes much significance because newspapers are banned by the State during moments of political crises, a result of which is that networked publics, including journalists, take to Twitter to keep the news and conversation going. Given the affordances of the digital platforms, journalists form an important part of this affective news environment, at times as originators of information and at other times converting a non-descript information into news and imbuing it with value and news salience. As one journalist noted, "In such situations, Twitter gives us a chance to confront those in positions of power" (Personal interview). Yet, others use it "intently for personal, professional, and reporting" purposes. Journalist Junaid Bazaz said:

“I apply same parameters for my post that I apply for getting anything published. When I put something on the web, I make it sure that it is factually correct. One has to be aware of the repercussions” (Personal interview).

Decades ago Bantz et al (1980) had warned of a relentless ‘news factory’ as the new work place for journalists and Philip Schlesinger (1977, p. 337) too proclaimed that newsmen are ‘members of a stop-watch culture’, a phenomenon that the digital age has rendered irreversible. This digital transformation has changed reporting and news content gathering in ways that are very different from the original journalistic practice evolved by the newspaper reporters (Pavlik, 2000). In the words of a woman reporter who was interviewed for the study, reporting without spending time in the field is a mindless enterprise:

“I would travel to places, spend time with my sources and get a sense of the situation. It would be an exciting leg work to explore places and delve into the lives of people and become witness of their situations” (Personal interview).

Being part of an organizational culture that demands more content in less time, going to the field and witnessing events in first person would mean missing deadlines which journalists are constantly chasing. To this end, the use of social networking sites has become inevitable in journalistic practice allowing reporters and editors to instantaneously select information from a variety of stories circulating on the internet. This essentially translates into re-editing and repackaging stories far removed from investigative reporting which has for long been considered the heart and soul of good journalism. Jamwal (2014) builds a case of ‘corporatization of media’ in Kashmir and an increasing dependence of newspapers on government support, government advertisements and even clandestine financial aid. Jamwal however does not furnish details of how it impacts the newsgathering process. Almost all major news organization in Kashmir have *Twitter* accounts and even before publication of newspapers into print, the organizations upload their news content on social media which is the reverse of what international media organizations would allow. This is the unstated practice in the region as it gives them a reach beyond readers in newsprint besides creating a buzz before the stories actually hit the headlines. Almost all journalists

interviewed contritely informed that prior to the penetration of digital technology, newsgathering would be a “shoe-leather” practice mostly based on face-to-face interviews with newsmakers, more outdoors than indoors, beyond their computer and smart phone screens. This of course seems to have fundamentally altered for reasons described above.

Another tendency that was observed in the case of j-tweeters was of being in the race to be the first to ‘break the news’. Ever since the advent of live television, being the first to break the news is seen as a measure of journalistic performance, winning appreciation from editors and peers and a necessary condition for success in the profession. It sets certain journalists apart from their colleagues as it fulfils the timeliness parameter of journalism, where competition among broadcasting stations accrues from who is the first to do ‘breaking news’, not so much from the quality of journalism. It brings in a certain machismo to the newsroom even if it means sacrificing journalistic principles of verifying information and attribution of sources. As a result, face-to-face interaction of reporters with their sources appears to be shrinking as journalists increasingly rely on social media for gathering information fundamentally altering the reporter–source relationship. Furthermore, such a newsgathering takes an altogether different form wherein a journalist becomes a passive seeker of information, disconnected from actual sources of information and its context, rendering him or her a mere conduit, denying any agency and role. However, for journalists, filing the story is more important than reflecting on the future of their profession or the role of a journalism in society.

Interviews with journalists further revealed that they took to twitter for two other reasons. One that it helped them connect to a larger audience, even when they concede that online news aggregation does not offer nuance and depth. Studies like by Gangadharbatla, Bright and Logan (2014) for instance demonstrate that the younger generation relies on social media for information and news even if they consider traditional media sources as more credible. Second and more importantly, most journalists felt that social media offered an alternate space of expression and also ensured a free flow of information despite the fact that recurrent political conflict and civil unrest in the region leads to frequent internet blockades impeding their social media usage. In some previous cases,

tweets by Kashmiri journalists on the microblogging site were removed by Twitter on the insistence of the Central government because the latter contended that the journalist's tweets 'violated' India's Information Technology Act (Ifex 2017). In an interview, journalist Wasim Khalid, told *Anadolu Agency*, the state-run Turkish news organisation, that removal of his tweets meant "intimidation of those who post the truth that will never be shown by Indian media" (Ifex 2017; Rafiq 2017). Jamwal (2014) thus observes, "[t]he power of the alternative media, including mobile SMS services and social media networking, remains limited and *subject to the onslaught* of whimsical official decisions" (emphasis added).

Despite these barriers, so much have social media platforms overwhelmed reporters in Kashmir that delegations of local people coming from far-flung areas to have their voices heard are hardly attended to by reporters in their offices in the Press Enclave in Srinagar. This was observed during the course of the fieldwork in Kashmir when a group of villagers who wanted to raise awareness about lack of basic amenities such as electricity and safe drinking water in their village informed us about media's indifference to their plight. After a long, unproductive wait an old man in the group remarked: "It seems nobody is interested to listen to us. We had come here with great hopes." Clearly, the field of the reporter has traversed from the real to the virtual world with telling consequences for news content. In a similar vein, Jamwal (2014) drawing a brief history of media in Kashmir argues that with the start of militancy in the region, professionalism 'took a backseat' and 'fostered a culture of unverifiable arm-chair stories' influenced either by 'nationalistic loyalties' or the 'fear' that prevailed during '90s.

More than anything else, fact-checking remains a major concern for journalists, as very succinctly contended by Hermida (2012) who construes social networks of real time news and information as posing curious challenges to the profession of journalism which is based on the discipline of verification "considering how journalism is evolving into a tentative and iterative process where contested accounts are examined and evaluated in public in realtime." A senior journalist, an active tweeter, reflected:

"I monitor Twitter to explore a multitude of voices, which I fact check before I embark on doing a story. For me, attribution is important. If an

unattributed information is on Twitter, I become sceptical” (Personal interview).

Our findings also suggest that news organizations follow mainstream politicians on Twitter while they mostly share their own content on Twitter accounts and tend to engage with the wider publics online. On occasions, however, media outlets retweet their own reporters’ tweets that have a higher news salience that the organization acknowledges and wants to push. At the organizational level, it was found that content sharing usually follows a top-down model which points to the normalizing tendency of newsrooms to new technology and its incorporation as long as organizational hierarchies and centralization are maintained not questioned or eroded.

Last but not the least, shutdowns by government during periods of political turmoil in Kashmir obstruct the mobility of journalists. In such situations, Twitter comes handy to collect information from multiple sources and pass it to a diverse readership online. Twitter offers journalists a platform where they are able to minimise risks while remaining engaged in newsgathering and reporting process. Twitter ensures their physical safety by allowing them to report on conflict from the protection of their newsrooms or homes far away from the epicentre of unfolding events. This in turn makes certain that journalists continue to do their work unlike those on the ground who have to face the wrath of both state- and non-state actors (Mir, 2016; Nadaf, 2019).

Conclusion

It is contended that a complex mix of factors ranging from changed occupational practices to technological developments emanating from global digital networks, besides local, political and economic dynamics are colluding together to alter age-old journalistic norms and routines in J&K. Whether the journalistic practices so evolved, flatten journalism in the fringes and standardise it in keeping with global trends, in a post-Arab Spring world, where Twitter and other micro-blogging sites provide new ways of telling stories, is too early to tell. However, technologies like Twitter can be enabling and empowering in conflict zones or geographically difficult terrains or places where the profession might be centuries old yet remains threateningly contractual (run mostly by

stringers and freelancers), all of which hold true in the case of Kashmir. In such a scenario, the future of journalism for the peripheral, economically unstable and politically vulnerable regions may be hard to predict but it is important to locate and put on record the powerful changes that digital networks are fuelling in the profession.

The study is particularly important to advancing an understanding of journalism as a process – as distinct from a product and one which emanates from recognition that journalism profoundly shapes public knowledge formation especially in a world where contests around truth have become beguiling and burdensome for both journalists and readers.

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