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The Power Shift: Analysing Transformation of Traditional Journalists to Digital Opinion Leaders and Newsfluencers Navigating with Algorithmic Apprehensions, Echochambers and Tribal Polarization

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ABSTRACT

A radical power shift has radicalized institutional journalism paradigms and gradually replacing it with hybrid, platformed journalism of digital media where traditional journalists are becoming Newsfluencers, content creators and digital opinion leaders. The study has employed qualitative research design to interview journalists who have experienced this complex transformation and navigating the multifaceted dimensions of digital platformed journalism. The findings of study have suggested that platformed journalism presents new paradigms of independence, freedom, mass reach to audiences as influencer yet it brings challenges to deal with online trolls and polarized consumers. The Algorithmic apprehensions, echo chambers, tribal polarization, hyperconnectivity, freedom vs responsibility, context collapse are reshaping media landscapes for both the journalists as content creators and audiences as consumers.



Introduction

The proliferation of digital media and social media platforms have transformed the traditional journalism and media landscape transforming into hybrid, digital platformed journalism. The traditional modes of communication, content creation and opinion formation have been replaced with new and modern means of communication for media professionals and general public as well.

Maitri et al (2023) highlighted the freedom and dynamic interaction at Social media platforms by stating that these platforms provide global interactive networks where people interact with millions of people about any issue where they can have easy access to millions of people and they freely express their views and opinions to their followers.

These platforms have provided journalists with new opportunities and power to set, reshape and manipulate audiences in their desired directions and dimensions. The freedom of expression in traditional media and new media are incredibly transformed. The gatekeeping authority of traditional influential groups have also been challenged by platformed journalism. The one-way influence has been replaced with active, multi-dimensional interaction as audiences are not just consumers but also active contributors deciding what topics must be discussed and highlighted. Digital News Report (2023) reported that the patterns of news consumption are undergoing a significant transformation and shift as now people prefer to watch their favorite journalists and follow their content at their social media platforms where they regularly post live coverages of important events and share their personal opinions through blogs, commentaries and analysis.

Different scholars have coined variety of terms to define contemporary transformation of journalists towards platformed journalism. Herbers and Bause (2021) used the term of “*Journalistic Youtubers*”, Leionen (2022) “*Journo Influencers*”, Fischer et al (2022) called them “*Political influencers*” but the most popular among all which truly represents the real transformation is “*Newsfluencers*” (Schapals, 2022). This term represents a systematic new role of journalists using platformed journalism for content creation, covering news events, reporting for public, sharing their opinions as influencers and opinion leaders.

The current study considered “Newsfluencers” as the most appropriate, systematic and true representative term for this transformation. Which explains how the journalists of contemporary digital media are playing multiple roles as news disseminating source as content creators and influencers at the same time at their digital media platforms. These platforms have demanding nature which compels these journalists to stay active, online and engage their followers in trending viral topic for satisfying their algorithmic apprehensions (Hurcombe, 2024).

The social media platforms most prominently X, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram all have reshaped digital interactions, information and opinion sharing patterns among people. These platforms have reshaped the way people share their opinions and influence each other through their communication. (Tarigan et al, 2023). Journalists have always been the most influential sources of information, communication and opinion leadership for general public. The traditional journalists who had limited means of direct communication with people now have active social media platforms for dynamic interaction and they have a significant number of followers. People seek inspiration from their favorite content creators and public figures. Conventionally only few journalists had access and power to influence people but due to social media now almost all the journalists have influential social media platforms, they share their opinions with freedom and resilience.

Research objective

The study aims to Critically evaluate the dynamics of radical transformation of traditional journalists into digital Newsfluencers, opinion leaders and content creators.

Research question

How traditional journalists are transforming into Newsfluencers, content creators and digital opinion leaders through platformed journalism?

Literature Review

Social media platforms are becoming the most potential sources of communication, information and interaction among people where they share their opinions and experiences with each other. These platforms make mass interaction possible within people and institutions at mass level where information and opinions can be shared to large audiences. Ausat (2023) discussed the power shift and transformation in interactions between people through their social media platforms. The study critically reviewed opinion patterns and their impacts through qualitative analysis. The findings reported that social media is playing substantial role in shaping public opinion and social interaction among people which affects the collective views of large audiences and masses in society.

Lorenz (2020) discussed the power shift of traditional news coverage to online streaming by stating that most of the young consumers watched live presidential election updates of US by Hassan Piker at his streaming platform instead of cable news. Piker had more than 4.5 million active viewers who preferred his live coverage over the television coverage showing that platformed journalism is somehow replacing mainstream journalism and journalists are getting more influential as content creators. News production and consumption patterns are getting more dynamic and the future is witnessing a power shift where traditional media is getting replaced through a shift by platformed journalism.

At social media platforms algorithmic apprehension plays substantial role guiding journalists for content creation and opinion sharing. Sometimes their professional journalistic integrity is affected due to algorithms as they have to follow algorithms and trends for maximum reach among audiences (Rahman, 2023). Traditionally it was established media organizations who had regulation and gatekeeping authorities to control how and what information to spread but now non-institutional online communities, influencers content creators and journalists determine what information should reach to audiences and how it needs to be framed and disseminated (Durani, 2024).

In traditional media gate keeping was a full fledged system where authoritative individuals from media, state, institutions and government used to act as gatekeepers. They decided what and how to disseminate through media. They completely controlled the opinion formation of public by their gatekeeping authority and acted as gate keepers and opinion leaders for their audiences. But contemporarily, due to social media and digital platforms there is an urgent requirement to reconceptualize theory of gate keeping. Now the paradigms have been shifted from traditional media centered gatekeeping to digital gatekeeping. Now not only humans but technologies, algorithms, echo chambers and automated systems are acting as new gate keepers. The process of gate keeping has been transformed from linear process to hybrid and multidirectional phenomenon reshaping traditional modes of opinion formation of people (Voinea, 20205).

A study was conducted to identify and analyze similarities between journalists and online influencers or content creators by using audience perspectives as lens which clearly concluded that normative traditional values of journalism are still prioritized by consumers. They expect journalists to share authentic, transparent, genuinely engaging content demonstrating that journalists cannot be considered as typical content creators or influencers but they have very high

expectation bar set by their consumers as they idealize them as their opinion leaders and not just an entertainment or style icon (Banjac & Hanusch, 2022).

Journalists as compared to other social media content creators bring more professional, authentic and credible content as they have professional qualifications and media expertise. Although platformed journalism at social media is often criticized for misinformation, unreliable information and other risks but still they have provided innovative opportunities for both journalists and audiences (Sobreira & Arriscado, 2024).

Research gap

The role of journalists as influencers and the transformation of traditional journalism into platformed journalism has not been studied critically in Pakistan. Which constitutes a huge research gap as this new transformation is making significant impacts in changing media landscape. Journalists are now preferring platformed journalism over institutional journalism because it gives them more recognition, independence and power as individual and make them use their leadership skills more strongly as opinion leaders free from traditional gatekeeping restrictions and influences.

Theory

The theoretical foundations have been taken from theories of Gatekeeping and Two-step flow for this study and operationalized as per the problem under investigation.

The evolution of Gatekeeping from institutional Newsrooms to digital algorithms

Traditionally, the Gatekeeping theory portrayed journalists, editorial boards and institutional establishments to have authority which information could be disseminated to mass audiences. But today after the digital media platforms journalists somehow are free from restricted and centralized limitations of their newsrooms and have opportunity to post their personal opinions to their followers but now the digital AI algorithms, echo chambers, context collapse, monetization dynamics are acting as new digital gatekeeping filters. Gatekeeping is not unidirectional process at all but transformed into a dynamic, decentralized process of interactions between journalists, AI algorithms, platforms and audiences (Wallace, 2018).

Twostep flow theory: Newsfluencers and Digital opinion leaders

The theory proposed that journalists have power to set, reshape and manipulate opinions of people which can be clearly seen in contemporary digital ecosystem when these journalists have become Digital Opinion Leaders, influencers and content creators. Now the interaction between journalists and their followers are multidimensional, active and vibrant due to hyperconnectivity.

Methodology

The undertaken study has employed qualitative research approach for interpretation of data accumulated from journalists to analyze how the power has shifted from mainstream media to digital media platforms and how they are using digital opinion leadership as content creators, influencers and opinion leaders.

Method: Semi-structured interviews: The data for this research has been collected from journalists using semi-structured interviews through personal interactions to dive deeper into their personal insights and experiences.

Sampling technique: The study has employed purposive sampling technique for selection of sample which included the journalists with active social media platforms who use their social media for platformed journalism and digital opinion leadership.

Data collection: Open ended questionnaire has been used as an instrument for data collection from the selected sample of participants.

Data Analysis: The data has been analyzed using Thematic Analysis technique to identify the most pertinent aspects of problem under investigation and identify patterns and trends of power shift from traditional content creation and opinion leadership to digital opinion leadership and content creation by journalists.

Coding

The demographic information and other details have been coded below in the table about selected journalists for interpretation of their real-life experiences and perceptions for this study including their organization, experience, their social media usage and most frequently used platforms for content creation and opinion leadership:

Table 1: Profile information of participants for interviews

Sr. No.	Code	Organization	Experience (Years)	Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform(s)	Daily Usage (Hours)
1	P1	Samaa News	4	Instagram, Twitter	6
2	P2	Neo News	11	All Platforms	8
3	P3	SAMAA TV (Digital)	7	Instagram and X	14–16 hours (sometimes 24 hours during special events)
4	P4	Bol News	9	X, Facebook, TikTok	14
5	P5	Suno TV	14	Twitter, YouTube	2–4
6	P6	AAJ TV	17	Facebook, X, WhatsApp, YouTube	More than 10
7	P7	Bol News	13	X, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram	5
8	P8	Organization	0.8	WhatsApp, Instagram	18
9	P9	Samaa TV	15	X (Twitter) and Instagram	7–8
10	P10	Dunya News	26	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, X (Twitter)	3–4
11	P11	Freelance	22	YouTube	10–12
12	P12	Hum News	24	X, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn	6
13	P13	Hum News	16	WhatsApp, X (Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube	8
14	P14	Geo News	14	Facebook, Twitter	1

Findings and interpretations of interviews

The responses of participants of interviews have been transcribed below which reflect their real time experiences and opinions regarding power shift in journalism due to platformed journalism. The journalists have shared their perceptions about changing media landscape and new opportunities, challenges and dynamic facets of modern content creation by journalists as creators and opinion leaders in digital spaces and vigorous consumption by audiences as active consumers. The study identified eight themes including algorithmic apprehension,

Algorithmic apprehension

“It has become need of today to keep active online presence and very important to stay connected with social media followers. Hashtags related to popular and viral topics works like magic” (P1).

“In today’s media landscape, an active social media presence is essential. It helps journalists stay relevant, build credibility, and directly engage with audiences. Algorithms strongly influence content strategy. While using trends, keywords, and thumbnails increases reach, over-reliance on them can compromise journalistic quality” (P2).

“Algorithmic apprehension is now a real part of digital journalism. To reach audiences, journalists need to understand viral topics, keywords, hashtags and thumbnails, but this should not replace accuracy, ethics and public interest. Algorithms can help important stories reach more people, but if journalists only chase trends, journalism can become sensational and shallow” (P3).

“Now it has become essential part and parcel of our daily routine. It has become a basic ingredient of content creation. It takes a little effort but provides a wide reach (P4)”.

“Social media presence is vital for popularity among public. Sometimes we can touch social topics which are not trending. & people watch it for a change” (P5).

“We keep active on social media to stay in limelight for our followers. I always try to follow trending topics” (P6).

“Algorithms guide us to stay relevant. I often follow popular trends because that you can convey your message to a larger audience” (P7).

“An active presence helps reach, visibility, and impact, but it should support journalism, not replace credibility or reporting quality” (P8).

“It improves discoverability, but it can distort priorities, pushing journalists toward virality over depth and meaningful reporting” (P9).

“Algorithms reward relevance so viral topics, specific keywords, hashtags, and strong thumbnails are non-negotiable. We should build them into the content plan” (P10).

“In today’s media landscape, journalists need an active social media presence to stay relevant and effectively reach their audience” (P11).

“Thumbnails can quickly give you a clear idea of the content, making it easier to choose what you want to watch; however, an overload of flashy thumbnails isn’t necessary keeping them simple and concise is more effective” (P12).

“Algorithms are important and they tell us what to discuss as an influencer and opinion leader for people besides all this, I also hunt content and news Content creation on viral topics, keywords, hashtags, thumbnails are critical to boost algorithm Because using viral topics, the right keywords, hashtags, and an attractive thumbnail helps the algorithm recognize the content, reach a larger audience, and increase engagement” (P13).

“Social media has become part of our life, Breaking news, current issue, Pakistan, social media, viral news, issues in Pakistan ” (P14).

Digital opinion leadership and influence

“I think it is good everyone has a chance to showcase their work and their presence from different platforms. It is a good change because everyone has a right to grow in their field and this is the best way (P1)

“This shift has democratized journalism, allowing every journalist to influence public opinion. However, it has also increased misinformation and reduced traditional editorial control. Positive: Independence, broader reach, personal branding Negative: Lack of accountability, rise of misinformation, sensationalism” (P2)

“This transition shows that opinion leadership is no longer limited to TV anchors, columnists or senior editors. Today, every journalist with a digital presence can influence public debate through a tweet, reel or post. This has made journalism more democratic and immediate, but it also increases responsibility because even one careless post can mislead, polarize or damage credibility. The positive side is that journalists now have more independence, direct audience access and the ability to highlight stories that mainstream outlets may ignore. The negative side is that personal branding can sometimes overtake professional standards, leading to bias, misinformation, clickbait and pressure to behave like influencers rather than journalists. This power shift is useful only when digital authority is balanced with verification, accountability and ethics” (P3).

“It is breaking the hegemony of few stalwarts and opened up a window of opportunity for new content creators. I would rather term it journalism with responsibility. Freedom of expression is like oxygen for journalist but at the same time journalistic norms and values must be kept in mind” (P4).

“It is a good transition, but it doesn't have any editorial check. Anyone can say anything, it is easy to spread fake news and defame others. There should be some international social media regulations. Its positive aspect is more editorial freedom. And negative aspect is less check and balance and uneven incomes” (P5).

“Digital media is more powerful due to accessibility. Traditional journalists are still following ethics somehow influences ignore them” (P6).

“It has some pros and cons but overall, it’s better for journalism and also Journalist. Its most immediate and relevant tool to deliver what’s happening in real time. Secondly mainstream media is facing a lot of censorship in Pakistan. Journalist appearances on YouTube and X is more effective and shaping public opinion than traditional media outlet. I think positive thing is a freedom to report on those issue and topic which mainstream media can’t do it due to censorship

and negative aspect of digital media is lack of any authority like Editor to check the content or check the facts. Most of the digital content is not trustworthy. For the race of making money and viewership most of them creating a cheap content with lack of information. Money is their God” (P7).

“Democratization of media / instant influence. Positive: independence, reach Negative: accountability risk, misinformation” (P8)

“Media power moved from newsroom desks to everyone’s timeline. Today, one post can shape opinion faster than a full bulletin for better and worse. This shift has moved journalists from institutional voices to independent digital authorities â€” part reporter, part influencer, part brand. The credibility that once came from the institution now has to be earned by the individual, every single post” (P9).

“Access to news and information has certainly become easier, but the proliferation of fake news and fabricated stories driven by profit-making has pushed the truth into the background. Today, anyone can create their own narrative and influence public opinion at will. In the past, newspapers and television were the primary sources of news and information. These institutions were responsible for their reporting, analysis, and content, operating under a clear policy framework with proper editorial checks in place. However, with the rise of social media, journalists have become more independent, but at the same time, formal oversight and editorial control have largely disappeared. Today, anyone can publish whatever they want on social media, with little accountability. In my view, this has led to a decline in journalistic standards” (P10).

“The only positive aspect is that people now have the freedom to express their opinions openly, whether they are accurate or not. However, as a journalist, I do not consider social media journalism and vlogging to be fully credible or authentic. In many cases, it has simply become a means of earning money rather than practicing responsible journalism” (P11).

“The explosion of digital media has broken the barriers of communication, information, access to knowledge and storytelling, sometimes, a story filed by a citizen journalist becomes more compelling and reaches to millions. In the context of Pakistan, it is upside down, the amendments brought to PECCA has increased coercion, strict vigilance by authorities and frivolous cases have caused enormous obstructions with regards to free speech. The agenda-based content creation is encouraged, as a result little space is left to cover stories with objectivity, authenticity, accuracy and precision” (P12).

“This transition has changed journalism a lot. Earlier, only a few journalists in mainstream media could influence public opinion through TV, newspapers, or columns. Today, social media has given every journalist a direct voice. This power shift has both positive and negative aspects. Positive: Journalists now have more independence and can share information directly with the public, highlight important issues, and build a personal connection with their audience. Negative: With less editorial oversight, there is a higher risk of misinformation, personal bias, and content being driven by popularity rather than accuracy” (P13).

“I call it postmodern era, as it is AI era, where things have entirely changed; not only every journalist, reporter or editor has become public opinion maker but even non-journalists play vital role in opinion making. Positive impact is that every person is free to express his opinion or

thought. Negative impact is mostly unprofessional people don't care about fake news, so the trend of fake and false news is accelerating" (P14).

Eco chambers and polarization

"I think we do not bother bad comments and we should be positive in every aspect of life. It's quite fine someone unfollows you and the other one starts following you so it is as simple as that people want to see good content" (P1).

"I prioritize facts and professional ethics over audience expectations. Neutrality is important, even if it leads to criticism. I accept it as part of the job. Engagement may fluctuate, but credibility and accuracy are more important than popularity" (P2).

"I manage this pressure by staying anchored to facts rather than factions. I make it clear to my audience that my role is to question all sides, verify claims, and present evidence, even if that makes some people uncomfortable. Labels often come from polarization, but consistency in fair reporting over time builds credibility that outlasts such reactions. A drop-in engagement or unfollows is a short-term cost of long-term credibility. I don't measure success only through likes or shares; I look at whether the information is accurate, useful, and responsibly presented. When facing backlash, I engage where there is genuine criticism, ignore bad-faith attacks, and continue producing balanced content. Over time, a more informed and serious audience tends to replace purely reaction-driven followers" (P3).

"I limit myself to facts and avoid sensationalism. I believe every content or post has its own following. In case of losing followers, going live on YouTube or other social media platform is better approach to clarify your position or to make your point more impactful" (P4).

"It is very hard to manage, and sometimes we get influenced by it. I mostly ignore and try to cool down. Then I give my opinion in another post (P5).

"Yeah if we report without biases, we receive threats and trolling. Personally, I don't take pressures i try to be ethical" (P6).

"I love being a content creator. Whatever I wrote on social media, it's my own opinion, I didn't write to keep in mind what my followers thinks. I respect the response and welcome the criticism as well. I don't try to adjust my viewpoint as per my followers" (P7).

"Selective neutrality / audience pressure. Low engagement but ethical integrity" (P8).

"Managing Tribal Expectation' is tough because followers don't just want information, they want validation. The pressure to pick a side is real. If you don't echo the tribe, you risk being labeled a traitor. If you always do, you stop being a journalist and become a spokesperson. I see the drop in likes and the angry unfollows as the cost of doing this job honestly. Echo chambers reward you for saying what the room already believes. Nuance doesn't" (P9).

"We do not have such traditions here; there is complete freedom. With reason and facts unnecessary arguments solve nothing, and if someone still doesn't understand, then silence is the better solution" (P10).

“Just speak truth. Don't fall for zombies. People usually digest the issue if it is based on facts” (P11).

“A Journalist in Pakistan can only survive when he/she maintains objectivity, sometimes state narrative overshadows the actual content, as a result it becomes difficult for a Journalist dig the actual story. Most to the time he/she has to put into archives in the fear of labeled as a traitor. I try to shift other versions, engage them to soft stories or international content which sometimes crater more followers” (P12).

“Managing tribal expectations means staying committed to facts and professional ethics. A journalist should avoid taking sides just to please followers and instead focus on balanced, verified information. It's important to explain your position clearly, remain transparent, and prioritize credibility over popularity, even if it disappoints some people. When I share a balanced or nuanced view, I focus on credibility rather than engagement. Social media reactions can be temporary, but trust and integrity matter more in the long run. If some people unfollow or disagree, I see it as part of healthy debate and stay committed to sharing accurate and responsible information” (P13).

“As a responsible journalist one needs to think what is beneficial for the state and what's harmful, and avoid what others expect from him. Actually, a journalist cannot make happy every kind of reader. One has to generate positive and current informative news without care who likes or rejects it” (P14).

Context collapse

“We are working as influencers on social media so many people watch us so we should know our limits and boundaries because we are influencing others. Yeah once my personal clip got viral I did it for my channel it was a funny clip but my channel had a problem with that” (P1).

“I maintain a clear boundary by limiting personal content and ensuring my professional identity remains consistent and credible. At times, personal opinions are misinterpreted as professional positions. This has made me more careful and precise in my communication” (P2).

“I maintain boundaries by clearly separating roles: what I share as a journalist is fact-checked and in public interest, while personal content is limited and carefully considered. I avoid posting in moments of emotion, stay mindful of professional ethics, and treat every public post as potentially permanent. This clarity helps reduce confusion between my personal views and professional responsibilities. Instead of a specific unverifiable claim, I would frame it generally, there have been instances in digital journalism where a personal post or opinion was taken out of context and used to question professional integrity. In such situations, the response is to clarify the context, stand by verified facts, and avoid escalating the issue emotionally. Transparency and consistency are key to restoring trust when context collapse happens” (P3).

“It is very difficult to paint a line but obviously there has to be certain markings between social media engagement and personal persona. Yes, I faced backlash on certain posts which were not appreciated by the followers of a former PM. The post was based on facts so I was confident that the reaction would fade away within hours. It does happen” (P4).

“Since i have been associated with content production and less field work. I have been managing it. But it gets difficult at times. It has not happened as of yet” (P5).

“Somehow, I violate other I try the best to maintain a balanced between personal and professional life but it's really hard Yeah it usually happens with women journalists we face double trolling, character's associations what we are wearing n why we are even posting our work people usually judge us by our appearance” (P6).

“Mostly I use Social media for professional purpose and my opinions on different issue. I share my personal experience those are relevant to audience. Where I'm traveling or what's my routine, I never share it on Social media. No, it's never happens with me” (P7).

“Clear separation / digital discipline. Misinterpretation / reputational distortion” (P8).

“If everything is public, nothing is personal. And if you never draw a line, you stop being a person and become just a brand. Context collapse is the new weapon against digital journalists. The goal isn't to prove you wrong â€” it's to make you _personally_ controversial so people stop listening to your _professional_ work. The only defense is to do work so solid that even when they collapse your contexts, the facts still stand alone” (P9).

“I try to maintain clear boundaries by separating my professional work from my personal life. I share selectively on social media and avoid oversharing private matters. I also remind myself that not everything needs to be public, and I prioritize authenticity while maintaining professionalism. It is difficult but being a journalist, it is a duty. That has never happened” (P10).

“State never did it but political worker can do. Fortunately, never happen with me. Political party sympathizer does not need issue to troll you” (P11).

“It is so difficult, i hardly be able to express my progressive ideology on digital media, professional content always dominates. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity of undergo series of trainings at various media outlets, i tried to produce content in the perspective of contemporary media, for a brief period i also produced exclusive stories, some of them made me to relocate from Karachi to Islamabad” (P12).

“I manage this by keeping clear boundaries between my professional and personal presence. On social media, I focus mainly on journalism, information, and public issues, while keeping my private life limited. This balance helps maintain professionalism, credibility, and personal privacy even in an era where the lines are often blurred. Yes, there have been moments when a personal comment or a casual post on social media was taken out of context and linked to my professional work. Critics sometimes try to frame such posts as bias or question credibility. In such situations, I handle it by clarifying the context, staying transparent, and letting my professional record and responsible journalism speak for itself” (P13).

“Before writing or generating any content we must need to think that it should not fall under fake news, unethical, immoral or against the state. No there was not such time. I always try to keep boundaries between my personal and professional life” (P14).

Digital gatekeeping and filters

"I think we are gatekeepers in our digital life. Yes, there are a lot of filters people use in digital content" (P1).

"At times, personal opinions are misinterpreted as professional positions. This has made me more careful and precise in my communication. Platform algorithms, government regulations, and organized online groups act as new gatekeepers in digital media" (P2).

"Instead of a specific unverifiable claim, I would frame it generally, there have been instances in digital journalism where a personal post or opinion was taken out of context and used to question professional integrity. In such situations, the response is to clarify the context, stand by verified facts, and avoid escalating the issue emotionally. Transparency and consistency are key to restoring trust when context collapse happens. Today, gatekeeping is no longer controlled by a single institution. It is a layered system. Platform algorithms decide visibility, platform policies decide what stays or gets removed, the state can impose legal or regulatory limits, and online mobs can create pressure by amplifying or suppressing narratives. In practical terms, the strongest gatekeeper is the algorithm, because it controls reach- while legal frameworks and coordinated online behavior shape what is safe or risky to say. So, it is not one actor, but an ecosystem of control" (P3).

"Yes, I faced backlash on certain posts which were not appreciated by the followers of a former PM. The post was based on facts so I was confident that the reaction would fade away within hours. Well would say all of the all the mentioned gatekeepers do have a role" (P4).

"It has not happened as of yet. Yes. But once you stick to your stance. Your followers would know that their outbursts would not impact your narrative" (P5).

"Yeah it usually happens with women journalists we face double trolling, character's associations what we are wearing n why we are even posting our work people usually judge us by our appearance. Audience, state and laws all still are gate keepers" (P6).

"No, it never happens with me. I think its platform owners if we talk about specially Facebook. But some other factor also involved as state aggression" (P7).

"Misinterpretation / reputational distortion. Algorithms, platforms, state, audiences" (P8).

"Context collapse is the new weapon against digital journalists. The goal isn't to prove you wrong â€" it's to make you _personally_ controversial so people stop listening to your _professional_ work. The only defense is to do work so solid that even when they collapse your contexts, the facts still stand alone. The old gatekeepers wore suits and sat in newsrooms. The new ones do not sit anywhere they're distributed, invisible, and they all have keys to different locks" (P9).

"In my view, a serious and responsible person already defines their own boundaries and is fully aware of them before writing or speaking anything. That is why, when I post or express something on social media, I do so after answering to my own conscience. In our context, everyone is free on social media, but as far as state policy is concerned, such frameworks exist in every country" (P10).

“State never did it but political worker can do. Fortunately, never happen with me. Political party sympathizer does not need issue to troll you. Viewer or subscriber have some influence. But dictate word is not suitable” (P11).

“Fortunately, I have had the opportunity of undergo series of trainings at various media outlets, I tried to produce content in the perspective of contemporary media, for a brief period I also produced exclusive stories, some of them made me to relocate from Karachi to Islamabad.

There are no gatekeepers in digital media, I believe in self-censorship, don't go into gray areas to generate unnecessary controversies” (P12).

“There have been moments when a personal comment or a casual post on social media was taken out of context and linked to my professional work. Critics sometimes try to frame such posts as bias or question credibility. In such situations, I handle it by clarifying the context, staying transparent, and letting my professional record and responsible journalism speak for itself. Today, there isn't just one clear gatekeeper like traditional editors used to be. Control is more scattered. Platforms decide what gets seen through their algorithms.” (P13).

“Digital platform is a stage where anyone can come and perform, and seek public attention and fame, and even play role in changing or making public opinion; however, it is easy for famous personalities to do it” (P14).

Hyper connectivity

“Sometimes It is good to interact with people but on the other hand it has some negative vibes because you have to deal with hate also. I guess sometimes it's not good for our mind social media has a negative impact also because our mind needs relaxation and due to this, we cannot rest” (P1).

"Direct engagement, audience feedback, transparency. Cons: Trolling, harassment, spread of misinformation. Positive: Real-time reporting, faster news delivery. Negative: Mental stress, burnout, lack of work-life balance” (P2).

“The positive side of interaction is immediacy, you get real-time feedback, access to diverse perspectives, and can correct or update information quickly. It also helps build trust and audience connection. The negative side is noise and hostility, misinformation spreads fast, discussions can become abusive, and there is constant pressure to respond instantly, sometimes before full verification. It can also blur the line between informed critique and mob reaction. Hyper-connectivity allows journalists to stay updated, break news faster, and engage audiences continuously. It increases reach and relevance in a fast-moving news cycle” (P3).

“Positive side, it provides an opportunity to explain a particular point or topic. Live engagement provides an opportunity to increase the reach. But on flip side, negative commentary can land you in problem because you can't edit. It is really challenging. Story changes with every passing minute so tracking a particular story on social media is very crucial” (P4).

“Most people follow their opinion and do not want to hear anything against that. It has resulted into an argument which did not go well. It is evolving and so far, it has more positive expects, it needs to be regulated to avoid fake news and defamation” (P5).

“Hyper connectivity harms our privacy somehow, we become known which is a big challenge for women who are working in media. It is more challenging than traditional journalists usually want follow this routine” (P6).

“I think you can share your opinion and interact with different kind people is positive think where you can build new connection and learn something new. Negative side is a troll and something I feel it’s a waste of time. No body can’t stay online 24/7 but information flows are 24/7 on social media. It’s matter issue to issue, sometime you have to be more active and some time you are just going with your routine” (P7).

“Social media has transformed journalism from one-way communication into a two-way conversation. Being constantly online allows journalists to break news faster, stay updated globally, and remain relevant in a fast-moving digital environment” (P8).

“Traditional journalism was a monologue, we published, you read. Social media turned it into a live conversation. That interactivity is a gift and a minefield. Digital journalism never sleeps and neither can you, if you let it” (P9).

“Positive aspect: Social media allows journalists to directly engage with the public, receive immediate feedback, and gain access to a wider range of perspectives. Negative aspect: However, this direct interaction can also lead to unnecessary pressure, trolling, and the spread of misinformation, making it more difficult for journalists to maintain objectivity” (P10).

“Hyper connectivity sometimes becomes an opportunity but also becomes a significant challenge as well. Because it has demanding nature one has to be there no matter what. You have to be active and share content at all times which gets difficult but is necessary for this digital world” (P11).

“Although, interactions with media practitioners really makes difference, the negative side is one has to be over vigilant. Digital media is all about maximizing presence, in the existing scenario, i remain engage with local, regional, national and international content. The appetite of digital media is humongous” (P12).

“Interaction on social media has both sides. It helps journalists connect directly with people, get feedback, and respond quickly, which builds trust. But it also brings challenges like misinformation, online pressure, and sometimes aggressive or emotional responses that can distract from facts. Always being online helps journalists react quickly, cover news instantly, and stay connected with people. But it also creates pressure, stress, and no clear break between work and personal life. Sometimes the rush to stay updated can even affect accuracy” (P13).

“Negative sides are involvement and tress passing in others personal life and discussing other peoples’ life without any good reason. Positive side is getting awareness about social issues.

“Yes, social media is a kind of world where there is no night and no break and no lunch time” (P14).

Monetization & The Game of Likes/Shares/Clicks

“I choose a sensational high-quality content. It affects people mental health everybody should know it is a part of life do not rush for likes and followers” (P1).

“There is pressure to prioritize engaging content, but I aim to focus on meaningful and responsible journalism over sensationalism. I don’t measure a story’s value by likes or views. Importance is defined by its impact and truth, not engagement metrics” (P2).

“The pressure to stay monetizable or relevant is real, but it should not dictate editorial choices. Sensational stories may bring quick traffic, but they damage credibility over time. A responsible approach is to package high-quality, investigative work in a way that is engaging - through strong storytelling, clear headlines, and accessible formats - without compromising facts. Sustainability should come from trust, not just clicks. The game of likes is a psychological challenge, but metrics do not define the value of journalism. A story’s importance is determined by its public interest, accuracy, and impact, not its immediate performance. If a well-researched piece gets fewer clicks, it still holds value” (P3).

“Normally, monetization impacts the content but being a responsible journalist, it is a core duty to draw a red line. I rather try to improve the way of presentation” (P4).

“Yes, it happens often. It is hard to manage. It is like an addiction which influence journalism” (P5).

“Yeah sensational content is more effective on digital media. Somehow but if your story is credible does not needs likes” (P6).

“I prefer to choose a high-quality investigative piece. I don’t get in the likes and comments race” (P7).

“Responsible journalism prioritizes quality over sensationalism and long-term credibility over short-term clicks. I try not to measure the value of my work through likes or views. A well-researched story remains important even if it doesn’t go viral” (P8).

“If my feed ignores the algorithm entirely, I’m a journalist with no audience. The job is to live in the middle and never lie to stay there. The Game of Likes’ messes with your head because it turns impact into a scoreboard. You can spend weeks on an investigation that gets 800 views, then watch a 15-second reaction video hit 800k. If you let the algorithm decide what mattered, you’ll stop doing real journalism” (P9).

“I firmly believe that the coming generation should be guided towards seriousness and truth rather than sensationalism. They should be told the truth in a way that is meaningful and helpful to them. Sensational and dramatic stories, noise, fabricated narratives, and morally degrading content are, in my view, harming and undermining our younger generation. I am not very active on social media, so it doesn’t really make a difference to me” (P10).

“Topic of the day will be discussed. Whether it is sensational story or high quality. In fact, both are same sometime. Like America Iran war. You just need a good research-based topic and that's it. No need to do anything special” (P11).

“Many times. It depends on the mood of digital media consumers, a compelling story may get good clicks, it is all about the substance” (P12).

“Platforms often reward attention and speed, so sensational stories may get more reach than slow, detailed investigative work. But strong journalism tries to stay focused on quality and impact, even if it is less because credibility matters more in the long run. Likes and clicks can be disappointing, but they don’t decide the value of a story. I try to judge it by its importance,

accuracy, and impact, not just numbers. Sometimes the most meaningful journalism doesn't trend immediately, but it still matters" (P13).

"Monetization confers you not only opportunity to reach more audience but to generate revenue as well. It requires not only punctuality but selection of viral and informative topics to upload. Actually, every story has its importance, one story can have importance for one person and another story related to another field can have importance for other person. It dependence upon the interest of reader" (P14).

Freedom vs. Responsibility

"I try my best to not post anything worthless r to behave responsible on social media as a journalist. I guess freedom brings sense of responsibility in itself" (P1).

"I verify information, cross-check sources, and avoid rushing to publish. Accuracy and responsibility come before speed. Freedom of expression is important, but responsibility is crucial. Journalists must ensure their content does not mislead or cause harm" (P2).

"Acting as your own editorial board requires discipline. Before posting, I rely on a simple internal checklist: verify information from credible sources, cross-check facts, avoid emotional or rushed language, and assess potential harm. If something is not fully confirmed, it is either held back or clearly labeled as developing. Transparency, corrections when needed, and consistency in standards are essential to maintaining credibility and trust. It makes me more responsible, not restricted. I value freedom of expression, but I balance it with accuracy, context, and impact - so I speak freely, but carefully and factually" (P3).

"I do not instantly post. I usually wait for details and do cross check. While posting any stuff, consequences and national interest must be kept in mind. Here I would emphasis on National interest rather than favoring or serving the interest of a particular official" (P4).

"I try to check the news from multiple authentic sources before posting anything. I believe in Strict editorial check and responsible journalism like it used to be in print media" (P5).

"For years I am working so I don't post for likes I post to inform aware or entertain or something warn about. I believe freedom of expression with responsibility of social cause" (P6).

"Using the freedom to post anything, I check the facts and ensure it should not be a misleading or misinformation. Yes, it makes me more cautions always" (P7).

"In digital media, credibility is built on discipline. Being fast is important, but being right is essential. If my words can influence public opinion or trigger real-world reactions, I must ensure they are responsible, fact-based, and ethical. Balance between freedom and responsibility is the core of good journalism" (P8).

"The freedom to post instantly comes with the duty to think institutionally. My freedom of expression ends where deliberate harm begins. I won't dilute facts to stay safe, and I won't inflame to stay relevant. If a post can move people to action, my job is to make sure its action based on truth, not rage-bait. The moment you stop feeling the weight of that responsibility, you shouldn't have the mic anymore" (P9).

“There is a search engine in the world, and there is also a research process. Research itself means verifying things again. So, whenever I receive any news or information, I try to confirm it from at least two additional sources. And if it is my personal analysis, I clearly state that it is my personal opinion. I respect the feelings of others and do not try to impose my opinion on anyone” (P10).

“I will survive only if I am doing real journalism. Viewers now days are very sharp. They have so many choices, quality work is the only option to survive. Market is very competitive I know the sensitivity and have to act accordingly. Its responsibility and everybody on social media should know about this” (P11).

“I cross check through various sources and then upload the content, for a professional Journalist, cross verification is crucial. The emergence of digital media developed it own mode of communication, you need not to have a literary background or familiar with relevant jargons, the medium has to be simple and appealing” (P12).

“I double-check facts, verify sources, and think about possible impact before sharing anything. I also separate breaking updates from confirmed news when needed. For me, credibility is more important than speed, because trust once lost is hard to regain. This responsibility definitely makes me more cautious. Freedom of expression is important, but it comes with accountability especially when words can influence real-world reactions. So, I try to balance both: speak freely, but only after thinking about accuracy, context, and possible impact” (P13).

“Before uploading any sort of content or piece of information, we need to think what we are uploading, why we are uploading, what are the positive and negative impacts of that content and last but not the least whether is the piece of information fake or real. Yes, of course Our single word we upload on social media can not only spark protests but to become cause of our harm as well” (P14).

Discussion and analysis

The digital platformed journalism has given rise to new trends where journalists have endless opportunities to self-brand themselves for popularity, recognition and influence among general public. They are somehow free from institutional censorship and editorial control by traditional gatekeepers as digital platforms provide them with freedom of expression to post and share anything. As per the findings of this study both these paradigms have incredibly transformed and revolutionized their role from just ordinary journalists to influential celebrities and popular digital opinion leaders, free from tight editorial board gatekeeping authorities by their organization, state or government.

Although it can be understood that this freedom still has some restrictive factors and filters, be it the platform regulatory authorities or maybe some other powerful establishments or organizations to which these journalists are officially employed. Apart from that these digital platforms and their AI algorithmic apprehensions, echo chambers, tribal polarization from audiences, context collapse sometimes also become strong filters for these news reporters or journalists who now have become social media influencers, content creators which are now given a new term of “*Newsfluencers*”. This is how the whole dynamics and process of gatekeeping has undergone an evolution where algorithmic apprehensions, tribal polarization, context collapse are setting new precedents and filters new for Newsfluencers and journalists as social media content creators.

The constant online presence and hyperconnectivity gives journalists immediate access to news, allowing them to report events in almost real time. But the pressure of being available at all times

can also increase the chances of errors. However, the downside is burnout, reduced time for deep verification and the pressure to be constantly available. It can also lead to mistakes due to speed and create a cycle where visibility is prioritized over depth. Managing this requires setting limits, prioritizing accuracy over immediacy, and maintaining a sustainable workflow.

Conclusion

The study has critically reviewed the transformation of traditional journalism into platformed journalism focusing on the role of journalists as content creators, influencers and concluded that modern day journalism has innovative journalistic practices making it more dynamic. The access to information has become not only compatible yet interesting and engaging as well due to platformed journalism. The consumers have wide range of options, they follow their favorite journalists and follow their opinions. These digital platforms gave more freedom to journalists as well as they feel free to share their personal opinions on hard issues as they have less pressure from gatekeeping authorities and institutions. But these new opportunities have also offered new challenges where they have to follow AI algorithms, echo chambers, deal with tribal expectations and polarization, online trolls and context collapse issues. Conclusively this power shift and transformation shows the incredible innovative journalistic practices of contemporary era which demonstrates that the future has even more interesting and fascinating new ventures for journalists and engaging gratifications for audiences.

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