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REIMAGINING MEDIA AS A CIVIC PLAYER

A NEW OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS IN DIGITAL AGE

MASTER OF ARTS IN LAW AND DIPLOMACY CAPSTONE PROJECT
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Abstract

In today's complex world, the term 'media' brings a myriad of forms to our attention. Whether it is traditional print media, television, radio, or online-based multimedia setup, the basic aim of all media ventures is same – keep their readers/consumers informed about the latest developments in an area that the media organization focuses on. But the critical question that needs more deliberation is about the intended purpose of this information dissemination. Are media organizations obliged to cater to their customers/audience? Generate profits for its benefactors? Serve citizens in their pursuit of taking informed decisions? Or fulfil all these aspects? This capstone project delves into these questions and tries to look at the evolution of media, the current situation, and whether the media organizations are succeeding in this endeavor. The capstone is primarily set against the backdrop of a need for an alternative operational plan for a media organization and the possible ways of achieving those changes. Capstone also draws from a pilot project I conducted during Summer 2016 in a tribal area in Southern Indian state of Kerala. The project was made possible with the financial help from Hitachi Foundation, Tufts Institute for Global Leadership (IGL), and Institute for Business in Global Context (IBGC).

Introduction

Though it has been only about 50 days, saying that election of Donald Trump in 2016 US Presidential Election threw media into a deep turmoil, is already a cliché. Several acres of newsprint have been spent in deliberating various aspects of the outcome, which none of the mainstream media could predict.

Though it is ambitious for a capstone project to address all the issues that went wrong with the projections and predictions of the Presidential Election, it is nonetheless tempting to engage with at least some aspects. But still, I have to pick an aspect. But which one? There are several types of media organizations each with their own unique focus and target audience. This capstone looks at one of the aspects observed in the aftermath of the elections – gradual abandoning of local communities by media organizations and the resultant disconnect between the media and people. Adhering to the main theme of this capstone, I deliberate on the aspects that will help media remodel itself as a civic player. Where ever I mention media in this capstone, my primarily focus is on a media organization that caters news, views, and analysis to a small community, not larger than a population of about 100,000. It will be another cliché to say that we now have technologies that can help a clear two-way communication between media and the community, and I primarily discuss elements of strategy that can be incorporated in an alternate operational plan that can utilize the latest technologies in engaging a community productively. The primary aim, however, is to achieve this while avoiding the familiar paths of hyper-centralization and consumerization.

Based on a pilot project conducted in summer of 2016, the capstone is set, not in the USA, but in tribal village of Attappadi, in southern Indian State of Kerala. But various aspects of community-media relationship deliberated here can have a strong bearing on media's ability in engaging community anywhere across the world.

To make this complex subject easier to handle, I divided the capstone into three major portions. The first portion titled 'Media and its users through a Monocle', will take us through a brief but important journey through the land of theory. This three-page section deliberates on different phases of media evolution – its early days when media was essentially local press, evolution of mega media organizations enabled by technologies, and its effects on the citizens whom media was catering to in the first place.

The second portion is about a brief survey of Indian media, its evolution as an industry, regulations it faced, and the current scenario.

The final portion will look at the aspects of operational plan and will deliberate on six elements of strategy that I identified as important in remodeling media operations.

I conclude the capstone with the possible shape a media organization engaging hyper-local communities can take, my own observations in the light of this analysis, and this project might help achieve a symbiosis between media and community.

Media and its users through a monocle

Media as a tool to inform people

For most people, not a day passes without interacting with a media product in one way or the other. Media is associated with many tasks, be it a medium of spreading information (and at times disinformation), acting as a watchdog, or even working as a mouthpiece to bring out voices, media occupies a special place. But what is so special about the media organizations and the work they do?

Deliberating on this precise question of what is special about media when compared with other forms of actors in the society, Sean O Siochry and others, in their book, *A Beginner's Guide to Global Media Governance,* (2002) observe that "Media products are different, not least because they are more than just consumer goods – in Important respects they also produce us[1]." What the authors seem to suggest is that media through its act of information dissemination helps us in evolving our understanding of the world around us and helps us make sense of it.

Paul Starr argues[2] (2004) that media was accorded a special place by the founding fathers of the United States of America as they acknowledged its importance. Acknowledging the importance of free expression, the first amendment to the Constitution of the USA guarantees freedom of speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion. However, not limiting to the technical aspects of the

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[1] Siochrú, Seán Ó, Bruce Girard, and Amy Mahan. Global Media Governance: A Beginner's Guide. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield., 2002. Chapter 1, Page 3

[2] Starr, Paul. The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications. New York: Basic Books, 2004.

freedom accorded to media in its service of information dissemination, the founding fathers of the US imagined media essentially as a tool for nation building, the logic being that only well informed citizens could create a vibrant democracy in a fledgling republic spread over a vast area, Starr points out. Surveying the development of media in the US and the role played by the then leaders, Starr elaborates,

"Popular sovereignty implied a change in the cognitive relationship between the state and the people. Traditionally, the state obtained information about its subjects but disclosed little about itself, except what served the interests of those in power. But if the people were to be sovereign, they had to have the means of understanding their government, keeping up to date about distant events, and communicating with each other. Since the seventeenth century, the development of communications, particularly newspapers and postal services, had begun to provide Europeans and Americans with regular information about the public world. But at the time of American Revolution, the actual public embraced far from a majority of people, the scope of such information was limited, and its costs high. By the 1830s, the public has expanded, the scope of knowledge was broader, and the costs had fallen. These changes did not happen solely through the invisible hand of market. Once again, political decisions played an important role[3]." (Starr 2004)

A comprehensive survey of the evolution of media, its intended purposes, the paths taken by the pioneers in the media, and the debates regarding the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the existence of media are beyond the scope of this capstone project. However, the point I wish to make here is that while media, as seen today, underwent several phases of development, the primary purpose of it was to help people be informed about the public world and help them in both evolving their understanding about the world surrounding them and actively participate in the process of shaping this worldview (as envisaged by those advocating a specific ideology). In the US, media, as an "ideological state apparatus", was used as a tool for propagating the ideologies of capitalism and republican form of democratic government, but in the totalitarian, illiberal, and authoritarian states like the erstwhile Soviet Union, and current-day Russia and China, media was, and still is, being used as a tool for propagating a different set of ideals. Being an instrument that is constantly in midst of an ongoing civic debate and engagement, media is in a phase of constant

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[3] Ibid, Chapter 3, Page 83-84

adjustment and evolution depending on the particular social, cultural, economic, and political setup of a society that it caters.

Evolution of Citizenship

Before we get into the media and its role towards citizens, we should also take a quick look at the evolution of citizenship as a concept. This brief detour is important as media, being a subset of a bigger society, is also susceptible to the trends and developments in social systems that it operates in at large.

Major part of 20th century, during which time media as we know it today was making rapid progress, saw a long-drawn fight between the capitalist and socialist models of economies, individualist-capitalist economies as represented by the USA and western nations, and the socialist-planned economies as represented by Soviet Union and other countries from communist bloc. It is now a common knowledge about how this fight was decisively put to an end when Soviet Union and its planned economy imploded, resulting in a rapid spread of liberal, capitalist, and democratic ideas and consequently, globalization of the world economies.

The notion of citizenship also evolved during this phase. In illiberal and authoritarian countries citizens were primarily viewed as subjects with associated duties and responsibilities, and very few liberties. Liberal nations, on the other hand, stressed the importance of democracy and inalienable rights and freedoms of a citizen.

With an emphasis on individual merit and advancement, among other things, the march of capitalistic economies resulted in growing inequalities between the citizens in those countries. Hoping to address this growing inequality, while retaining individual rights, in post-world war western societies, theorist T.H. Marshall propounded the idea of social citizenship[4] which had three components – Social, Civic, and Political. The political component was represented and fulfilled by the democratic from of government, social component was represented by the right to share social heritage and participate as a full and civilized member of a community, and the civic components had the elements of freedom of speech, right to own properties, and right to justice[5].

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[4] Marshall, T. H. *Citizenship and social class, and other essays*. Cambridge: University Press, 1950.
[5] Ibid

Summarizing Marshall's ideas of citizenship, sociologist Bryan Turner says[6], "The importance of Marshall's contribution is the claim that citizenship modifies the negative impact of the capitalist market by a redistribution of resources on the basis of rights, and as a result there is a permanent tension between the principles of equality that underpin democracy and the de facto inequalities of wealth and income that characterize the capitalist market place. Within hyphenated society, there is a dynamic and contradictory relationship between capitalism and citizenship, or in more abstract terms between scarcity and solidarity." (Turner 2001, p 191) Turner observes that with advancing globalization the traditional notion of citizenship is also changing.

The permanent tension between the notions of equality and de facto inequalities of a society that Turner speaks about are also endemic to media. Development of newer technologies, and advent of new avenues like social media created in-principle possibilities of self-expression for anyone and everyone, but social inequalities in general and the set-up of media as the primary gatekeeper in the dissemination of 'authentic' information affects the capabilities of an ordinary citizen to gain access to the channels to freely express this self-expression.

Impact of communication technologies and evolution of information consumer

There is a broad consensus among the experts and media professionals that advent of modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) had a great impact on media. While the jury is still out to decide if ICTs are good for the media in the first place, quite a bit of intellectual firepower has been spent in analyzing the effects of ICTs and how media organizations are changing/should change in response to the evolution of latest technologies and resultant possibilities.

Starr (2004) in his book points out that during the earlier days of media development in the USA, each locality had its own local media outlet, primarily a printed newspaper or magazine, that deliberated on the issues pertaining to that locality. Media theorist Mark D. Alleyne[7] argues that laying of telegraph lines helped in the evolution of mega media structures like newswires, and

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[6] Turner, Bryan S. "The erosion of citizenship." British Journal of Sociology 52, no. 2 (2001): 189-209. doi:10.1080/00071310120044944.

[7] Alleyne, Mark D. News revolution: political and economic decisions about global information. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

consolidate their power. James G. Webster (2014), in his book "*The marketplace of attention: how audience takes shape in digital age*" explains that development of broadcast technologies in twentieth century gave rise to powerful TV empires resulting in the "age of broadcast news[8]." Now, media is yet again in a transformation due to the rise of a connected world based on the platforms like social media which threaten the carefully constructed gatekeeping aspects of the traditional media.

One of the important by-products of the rise of modern ICTs is the deluge of information available for the people to consume (ibid.). This deluge of information results in a prominent shift in the way media operated for the greater part of last 150 years where it had a greater control, and often monopoly, over the availability of information in the market place. As Nick Couldry adds[9] (2003), "… the shift that has occurred over past 150 years from a world with insufficient information flows (leading to the mid-nineteenth century "crisis of control" that James Beniger [1986] saw as the driving force behind both modern communications and the birth of "scientific" management and accounting) to a world with too much information (many times over) – in effect, [causing] a reverse 'crisis of control', whereby the highest premium applies not to information production, but to information selection."

Noting this churn in the media, journalist, filmmaker, and founder of online news portal "*Out There News*", Paul Eedle, opines that, "Media becomes less relevant because people now have multiple information sources which are not controlled by gatekeepers. Anybody can communicate anything and that means that people can find out whatever they need to find out for their particular issue… there is a large irrevocable shift of power away from hierarchical bureaucracies whose hay-day was in a nineteenth and twentieth century industrial state, a huge spread of power away from bureaucracies to the individuals[10]…"

The ability to select and consume information gives a unique ability to people - they are no more part of a specific community dictated by specific identities, with avenues to exercise greater

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[8] Webster, James G. The marketplace of attention: how audiences take shape in a digital age. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014. Page 154

[9] Couldry, Nick, and James Curran. *Contesting media power: alternative media in a networked world*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Page 51

[10] Couldry, Nick, and James Curran. Contesting media power: alternative media in a networked world. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Page 50 (you have quoted Paul Eedie here not these people, please check)

expression of their individuality, an aspired trait in a capitalist society. Individualization of a person, however, poses significant challenges to the media where the very individualization of people also leads to a hybrid "re-molding of civic subjects into consumer subjects[11]." This re-molding is also accentuated by the fact that media organizations now customize their content and compete for the attention of individuals, particularly in an era that is marked by information overload and resultant "poverty of attention[12]."

There is a strong counterpoint to this argument which says that new technologies have provided people with the possibilities of organizing into communities based on commonly identified issues, solutions, and interests, and hence, the process of individualization is not a particularly troubling drawback of the modern ICTs. Proponents of this argument often point out to the Arab Spring movements that erupted in Middle-Eastern countries since 2011, to argue that technologies have enabled community mobilization. While not disputing the fact that social media did help people in organizing themselves, researchers point out that technological platforms only played the role of an enabler and that there must be an already mobilized community in place, which can take advantage of such enablers[13]. Implicit in their conclusion was the fact that a politically mobilized community can take the advantage of any medium or technology available to them to achieve their goals, and availability of technology alone does not result in community mobilization. In the aftermath of Arab Spring movements, the technology-enabled community mobilization failed to create a viable and sustainable public debate in most Arab countries that were affected by the revolutions. The resultant chaos lead to several studies over what is now termed as the triumvirate of 'clicktivism, slacktivism, and hashtag activism' that is common in the online and social media spheres, essentially pointing out that online activities by individuals do not essentially translate into actions on ground.

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[11] Wilson, Tony. *Understanding media users: from theory to practice*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Page 148.

[12] Webster, James G. The marketplace of attention: how audiences take shape in a digital age. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014. Page 6

[13] Wolfsfeld, G., E. Segev, and T. Sheafer. "Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First." The International Journal of Press/Politics 18, no. 2 (January 16, 2013): 115-37. doi:10.1177/1940161212471716.

While the debate on this issue rages on[14], rather than deliberating on the merits or demerits of individualization itself, I essentially look at the effects of this individualization on the media and its responses towards people.

The Question

In the above brief survey, we see a pattern - media started out as a tool for informing citizens but due to the gradual individualization, enabled by evolution of both technologies and the notions of citizenship, remodeled the citizens it engaged with, into its consumers. The relentless technological march, which during the last century consolidated media power into giant conglomerations, is now threatening media's monopoly over that very same power. This left media with its carefully evolved organizational and operational setup, struggling to effectively utilize those technologies. And finally, citizens now have a great variety of tools at their disposal, but, like media, they are yet to evolve ways to incorporate those tools to effectively mobilize themselves without the help of media organizations, which, history shows us, were at the center of most successful civic movements, resistances, and revolutions, both as a stage and as an enabler. This brings us to the questions central to this paper – In the current scenario, is it possible to reimagine media organizations as civic players who cater to citizens and not to consumers? What are the aspects that need to be addressed before media starts utilizing the currently available and developing technologies, while avoiding the paths of hyper-centralization and consumerization of its content?

The supplementary questions implicit in the main question would be, assuming media has greatest autonomy to the extent that it can set the policies of a government on all aspects, is media still free? If yes, then what are the key characteristics of a free media? If not, then who controls media in the first place? Can journalism, and in turn journalists, take press freedom as an end in itself?

Identification of a case study and analytical framework

These questions could be pertinent to media outlets anywhere in the world, but this Capstone will look at a case study in participatory media based on a pilot project, Rashmi, conducted by me, and

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[14] Lim, Merlyna. "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011." Journal of Communication 62, no. 2 (2012): 231-48. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01628.x.

two other classmates, during the summer of 2016 in Attappadi, a tribal area in the southern Indian state of Kerala. The final product of the pilot project, a 23-minute video program, was aired in a local cable TV channel. The choice of this case study is because it provides me a first-hand experience in delving into a new operational plan for a media venture.

Based on my experience as a journalist on ground, my academic pursuits at the Fletcher School, and the summer pilot project, I identified six major strategies in the operations of a media organization that needs to be looked at in-depth. This paper will analyze those aspects based on existing models of media, alternate experiments in that space, and my own experiences before and during the pilot project.

The strategies, (in no particular order) are as below:

1) People as judges of what they want to watch and read.
2) Avenues for the people to freely contribute while maintaining well-defined, minimal, and transparent gatekeeping by the media organizations
3) Time and resource independence for the journalists to dig deeper into the stories
4) News as a medium to generate debate rather than as an avenue for entertainment
5) Monetary independence
6) Editorial independence

A brief survey of Indian media
Media regulation

Like in the USA, traditional Indian media evolved during the Indian independence movement. Influenced by the strong socialist movements across the world during inter-war period (period between WWI and WWII), the then Indian leaders chose to follow a hybrid model of development after India gained independence in 1947. In the newly-formed Indian Union, they chose to follow the model of democratic republic led by state-led heavy industrialization and nationalization of segments considered to be important in nation building.

Though media was considered as an important tool in the nation building the them leaders chose to create free media. Being an active writer and contributor during the independence movement,

the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru maintained that a free media is important for the nation's development. Speaking to the Indian Parliament in 1951, he said that "The press is one of the vital organs of modern life, especially in a democracy. The Press has tremendous powers and responsibilities. The Press must be respected and it must also have co-operation."[15] During his 17-year term as Indian Prime Minister, Nehru ensured that his words were translated into actions[16] resulting in the establishment of independent media sector in India.

Notwithstanding Nehru's enthusiasm and support towards free press, media regulation took a different trajectory. After a painful and bloody partition of British Indian territories into India and Pakistan, where the spread of hate speech, rumors, and misinformation played a great role in the ensuing carnage, the very first amendment of Indian constitution was aimed at curtailing certain types of communications that could lead to public disorder and communal tensions in the society[17]. In his book, *"Indian Media: Global Approaches"*, Adrina Athique (2012) writes that Indian media inherited a strong culture of political resistance towards the state from the days of anti-colonial movements[18]. Juxtaposed with this culture, Athique observes, was the government's effort to reign in media by invoking the colonial-era rules of press censorship. The paradox in Indian media, Athique points out, is that while Indian government retained and strengthened the colonial-era rules to reign media in, it avoided direct control through nationalization of print media allowing Indian newspapers to develop a healthy ecosystem. The result of this, he points out, is a clear bifurcation of authoritative discourse of the nation-state and the competing articulations of popular nationalism – a perpetual tension between official distrust toward press and the free conduct of media[19].

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[15] "Nehru on Indian Press." South Asian Research Centre for Advertisement, Journalism & Cartoons. https://www.sarcajc.com/nehru-on-indian-press.html.

[16] Gooneratne, Elmo. "Nehru, the media and information." Nehru, the media and information - Ceylontoday.lk. August 05, 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. https://ceylontoday.lk/print20160701CT20161030.php?id=3875.

[17] "THE CONSTITUTION (FIRST AMENDMENT) Act 1951." Constitution Society Home Page. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.constitution.org/cons/india/tamnd1.htm.

[18] Athique, Adrian. Indian media: global approaches. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012. Page 34-35

[19] Ibid. Page 35

Development of media as an industry

Outlining the attitude of Indian constitution makers, Nehru, in his speech to the Constituent Assembly said that, "we have been extraordinarily lenient towards the Press, Indian and foreign. We have gone out of our way to tell them that we will not do anything even if they send message which are extremely disagreeable to us[20]."

In the early phase of development, print media was left to operate freely resulting in the establishment of several privately held national media companies like the Times of India, The Hindu, and the Hindustan Times, among others. Because of its extensive reach and perceived importance in 'educating' public, radio was kept exclusively within the government-controlled public service broadcast agency, All India Radio (AIR). AIR started experimental broadcasting of television in 1959 and TV segment was bifurcated from AIR in 1976 with the establishment of another public service TV broadcaster, Doordarshan (DD). DD started its nation-wide transmission in 1982. Same year, color TV was introduced in India.

While print media never faced the prospects of nationalization, it faced severe challenges during the 21-month long, state of emergency declared on June 1975 by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Gandhi, who ironically was Nehru's daughter, put severe constraints on media involving mandatory censorship, rationing of newsprint supply, and preventive custody of the voices critical to her regime[21]. This phase in Indian democracy had a deep impact on Indian media[22] in that it put to test Indian media's resolve towards upholding free speech and deepened the mistrust between traditional media and establishment.

As a part of the liberalization and globalization process embarked by India during early 1990s, the media scene altered significantly. Foreign media companies entered Indian markets through joint ventures in Indian television market with minority equity stake. The primary aim of restricting the equity was to allow a modicum of control over media companies and to ensure that they are liable

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[20] "Nehru on Indian Press." South Asian Research Centre for Advertisement, Journalism & Cartoons. https://www.sarcajc.com/nehru-on-indian-press.html.

[21] Pendakur, Manjunath. "MASS MEDIA DURING THE 1975 NATIONAL EMERGENCY IN INDIA." Canadian Journal of Communication, 1988. http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/3159/3197.

[22] Singh, Indu B. "The Indian Mass Media System: Before, During and After the National Emergency." Canadian Journal of Communication, 1980. http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/248/154.

to Indian laws. Foreign media companies, particularly broadcast giants like Star network, and others, entered fledgling Indian TV space with their Indian partners[23]. As Indian TV industry matured, this restriction was removed and foreign media companies can now operate through fully-owned subsidiaries registered in India.

Vernacular press and TV (Organizations that cater news in local languages)

One of the important contributions of Indian independence movement was strong political mobilization at grassroots level[24]. In a country like India where there are more than 150 languages, this mobilization was spearheaded by the vernacular press[25]. Vernacular press gained more prominence after the independence, and a report in Quartz estimates that the vernacular press will grow by 10-12 percent during 2017, a significantly higher number when compared with any other media organization across the world[26]. The report also speaks about growth in circulation as well as advertisement revenue in the local print media during the last three years. Again, a comprehensive survey of Indian media, with all its complexities, is beyond the purview of this capstone project, but the main takeaway from the Indian experience of vernacular media is the pivotal role it played in Indian independence movement, and later, its evolution as a formidable player employing more than 20,000 journalists and in turn helping uphold the ideal of free press by the sheer amount of diversity it represents[27].

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[23] Pathania-Jain, Geetika. "Global Parents, Local Partners: A Value-Chain Analysis of Collaborative Strategies of Media Firms in India", The Journal of Media Economics, 2001, 169-187. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15327736ME1403_3

[24] Chaudburi, Reba. "The story of Indian Press." The Economic and Political Weekly, March 12, 1955, 347-49.

[25] Akhtar, Javaid, Azra Asghar Ali, and Shahnaz Akhtar. "The Role of Vernacular Press in Subcontinent During the British Rule: A Study of Perceptions." Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS) 30, no. 1 (September 2010): 71-84. http://www.bzu.edu.pk/PJSS/Vol30No12010/Final_PJSS-30-1-07.pdf.

[26] Karnik, Madhura. "The future of India's newspapers lies in the hinterlands." Quartz. 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://qz.com/643982/the-future-of-indias-newspapers-lies-in-the-hinterlands/.

[27] Rothermund, Dietmar. India: the rise of an Asian giant. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 223-24.
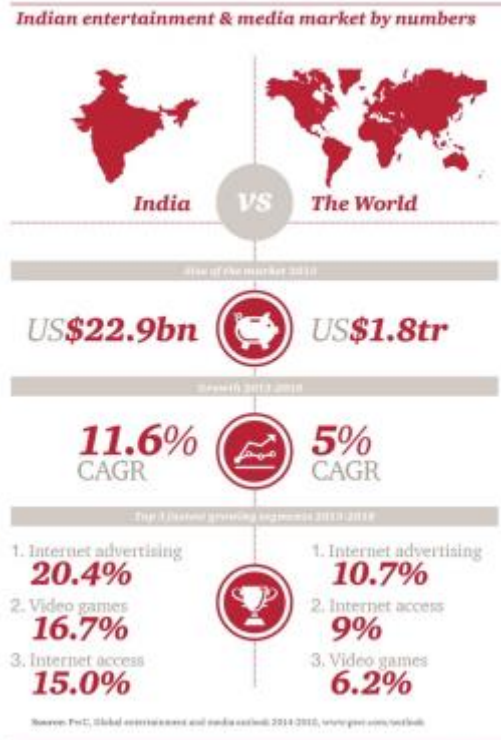
Like vernacular press, the vernacular TV segment in general channels is also a high growth industry in India. A 2014 Ernst and Young report observes that Indian TV industry is undergoing a significant change due to the technological developments. TV Industry is also set to grow due to an increase in the advertisement revenue. Like the general TV industry, the local news channel business is also a booming sector in India[28].

Social media and digital access in Indian media ecosystem

Consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), in its 2014-2018 Global entertainment and media outlook, India summary, forecasts that traditional Indian media will remain resilient through next two years and will also register strong growth in digital segments of the media[29]. According to the report, internet advertising, online video games, and internet penetration are three fastest growing segments in Indian digital media sphere.

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[28] Mahapatra, Devi Prasad. "Booming: Television News Channels in India." MyGC.com.au. 2015. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.mygc.com.au/booming-television-news-channels-in-india/.

[29] "Global entertainment and media outlook 2014-2018 Outlook ..." 2014. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.pwc.com/gx/en/global-entertainment-media-outlook/assets/indian-summary.pdf.

Indian entertainment & media market by numbers

India   VS   The World

US$22.9bn   US$1.8tr

11.6% CAGR   5% CAGR

1. Internet advertising
20.4%
2. Video games
16.7%
3. Internet access
15.0%

1. Internet advertising
10.7%
2. Internet access
9%
3. Video games
6.2%

Source: PwC, Global entertainment and media outlook 2014-2018, www.pwc.com/outlook

Riding on growth in internet access, India is fast catching up on the social media bandwagon. Following is a graphic by Statista showing social media penetration in India by the end of 2015.

Penetration of leading social networks in India as of 4th quarter 2015

Network	Share of population
Facebook	13%
WhatsApp	12%
Facebook Messenger	11%
GooglePlus	10%
Skype	10%
Twitter	8%
Hike Messenger	8%
LinkedIn	7%
Instagram	7%
WeChat	6%

Share of population

Source:
We Are Social; GlobalWebIndex
© Statista 2016

Additional Information:
India; GlobalWebIndex; 4th quarter 2015; 16 to 64 years

statista

The current growth in India is primarily driven by metropolitan areas and cites. Deliberating on the emerging scenario in digital space, a 2016 Ernst and Young report titled *"Future of Digital Content Consumption in India"* expects that by the year 2020 about 650 million people will have access to internet out of which about 50 percent will be from rural areas[30].

Rural users as a percentage of total internet population
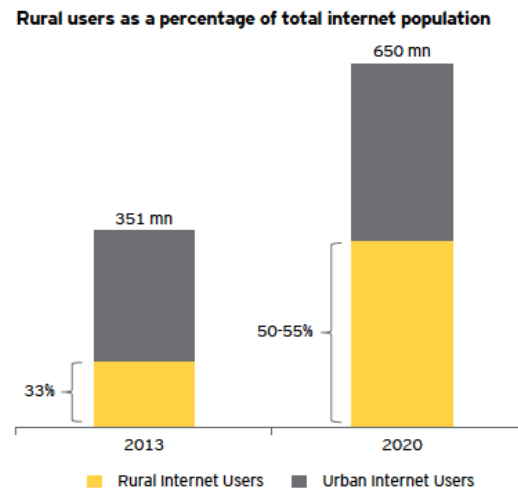
Adapting to the emerging digital era, most Indian media companies have successfully established a digital presence and can be found online, both with their own websites, and on the social media platforms. Keeping this as the backdrop of the capstone let us now look at the scenario in Attappadi, the main case study this capstone is based on.

Media consumption in Attappadi

Comprising 192 hamlets in the forested area of Kerala, a southern Indian state, Attappadi is a literal island. Reaching this place takes a two-hour ride through dense forests from the nearest road head, and nearest airport or a railway station are about six hours away when travelled by a car. Public transportation takes longer. Once predominantly a tribal settlement, 2011 census shows a significant decrease in the tribal population in this area, "from 90.26 per cent in 1951 to a bare 34

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[30] "Future of Digital Content Consumption in India - EY." Earnest and Young. January 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-future-of-digital-january-2016/$FILE/ey-future-of-digital-january-2016.pdf.

per cent of the area's total population now[31]." According to the 2011 census, there are about 30,658 tribespeople living in this area, in a total population of about 90,171. One of the major reasons for this demographic shift is the influx of settlers in the area who gradually pushed the tribes away from the fertile lands closer to water sources into the hilly regions that experience a severe water shortage. Several officials, experts, representatives, and people we spoke to explained that this was achieved mainly through coercion and deception.

Due to these demographic and social changes, the major languages spoken in the area are not tribal languages anymore, they are Malayalam and Tamil, the official languages of the two southern Indian states, Kerala and Tamil Nadu respectively. Due to this, the media consumption is also predominantly in these two languages. The population is predominantly dependent on TV for its news and vernacular channels in Malayalam and Tamil are very popular even among the tribespeople. Tribes, however, have their own languages, and there was an effort to launch a news program in tribal languages by the local cable TV channel, but we were told by the cable TV representatives that they could not sustain the program due to financial constraints.

I tried to look up earlier researches done on the media consumption in Attappadi, but failed to find any mention of it. However, there was a significant amount of work done on various sociological and economic aspects of the area. Some of the areas covered frequently by the researchers and the media, I found, were about child malnourishment, exploitation of women and tribespeople, land alienation of tribespeople, economic and social marginalization and resultant backwardness of tribes, and effects of settlers in the area. This interesting trend shows that Attappadi is literally one of those backwaters of Indian society where media time and again ventures into, to find a riveting human-interest story. Our fieldwork showed that neither the tribes nor settlers have any significant avenues for self-expression or possibility of voluntarily contributing to any media outlet, even though they have optimal options for media consumption, in the form of access to newspapers, TV, and radio channels.

We also found that the penetration of smartphones is not significant in the area, however, most people have 'dumb' phones and each village has at least one smartphone. While most settlers have their own TVs, most tribes do not have a TV set in their homes. At times, the tribal community

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[31] Shaji, K. A. "Death stalks Attappady babies." The Hindu. June 04, 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/death-stalks-attappady-babies/article7676728.ece.

gathers at a house that has TV to watch their favorite shows. News is also conveyed through the traditional modes of information dissemination - word-of-mouth, and sometimes gossip.

Operational Plan

Given the background we covered, let us now look at the six strategies identified earlier individually to examine reliable operational guidelines and plan for a media organization set in a community like Attappadi, and with people as its pivots.

Strategy 1: People as judges of what they want to watch or read

"People come here and tell us what our problems are and how to solve them. No one has come to ask us what our pressing problems are" – Shanti, a tribal women representative.

Shanti was responding to one of my questions about the problems she and her community faces on a day-to-day basis in her hamlet in Attappadi. Her statement summarizes the core problem most media organizations face – how and who selects the issues for media coverage. For decades, this question was dealt with a tried-and-perfected practice – experienced editors select what goes on the page/TV or radio show. Implicit in this practice is the fact that media organizations are the primary gatekeepers when it comes to identifying an issue and deliberating on it. How do editors select an issue? Most editors are not irrational in their decisions and traditionally they used their judgement of newsworthiness of an event to select which issues go on news and which do not.

 The sense of newsworthiness depends on what the news is deemed to be, and news is often defined as an 'extraordinary event'[32]. By this definition the mundane developments of a community rarely qualify as newsworthy when compared to the developments at regional, national, or international levels.

To capture greater public attention, one of the mantra my editors chanted regularly while I was a journalist, was that we should cover the issues that people want us to cover. But the critical question left unasked in those exhortations was, who decides what people want us to cover? The

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[32] Alleyne, Mark D. News revolution: political and economic decisions about global information. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

answer, again, is the same - it is the media organizations themselves that decide what people want and what they should cover.

With the advent of social media platforms, media organizations have cast their net wider to identify trending issues, but for any issue to find traction, it should first attract the attention of a journalist. On the other hand, a major trending event on a platform like Facebook or Twitter is usually picked up by the journalists. It is, however, rare to find a mundane community concern making it to top trending list on its own. Another possible avenue for the people to attract journalists' attention is blogging. With social media and blogs, there is a theoretical possibility of people being able to raise an issue and attract attention. Both these avenues have been lauded to be the next big wave with an ability to shatter the rigid media structures. Putting aside the fact that there is a need for an internet connection in the first place, which itself puts a vast number of people, who are yet to be connected, to a disadvantaged position, research on the ability of blogs and social media in influencing the media coverage shows that the social media platforms failed to influence media houses. Quoting one such research, Webster argues, "in only 3.5% of the cases, stories first appeared in the blogosphere and subsequently percolate to the mainstream media. In subsequent work, Stanford researchers reported that the incidence of hashtags in Twitter follow a similar pattern. So new media rarely offer something that's completely new; rather, they selectively amplify what's already out there[33]."

In all these scenarios, we see that it is the journalists who hold the primary role of judging which events are important to cover, and people, as a source if identifying a newsworthy event, assume only a distant secondary role.

There is a possibility of an argument that such a perception of news is routine in large media organizations that concentrate on regional, national, and international issues, and not in organizations focusing on local issues. But even in the news organizations like Patch.com, which caters to the hyperlocal communities, the situation is similar. In their endeavor to reach out to people in smaller communities, Patch is leveraging multiple forms of information gathering, through social media, local organizations, and its own journalists and editors[34]. Though Patch is

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[33] Webster, James G. The marketplace of attention: how audiences take shape in a digital age. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014. Page 63

[34] Marshall, Jack. "Patch Rebounds After Split From AOL." The Wall Street Journal. February 02, 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.wsj.com/articles/patch-rebounds-after-split-from-aol-1454445340.

still experimenting with latest technologies, the primary responsibility of identifying a story in this organization is still with the journalists and editors making them the primary gatekeepers.

Commenting on the enduring nature of the perception of news, in media organizations, Webster points out, "(in) the "age of broadcast news" when a few outlets dominated the audience, the news was what professional journalists determined it to be. It was they who differentiated facts from opinions and set the public agenda. Political ideas were reported in the news and rest everything else was just entertainment. That focus on the news persists[35]."

Challenging such traditional gatekeeping, ventures like the Nextdoor, a neighborhood social network, veers to another extreme and dispenses off with the involvement of journalists all together. Its forums are moderated by local people who act as leads. Leads are usually the people who start the local groups/pages, but Nextdoor staff can also change the leads based on a person's contribution to a group. While the idea of a community-led initiative was supposed to be an answer for the perceived lack of avenues for individual participation and to remove the gatekeepers, Nextdoor attracted strong criticism in that the discussions on the forum often amplify negativity. Martha Ross, writes, "Nextdoor becomes like any (other) social network, with all the good and bad that comes from giving people a venue to let their free expression fly from the remote isolation of their laptops and smartphones. With Nextdoor, that means bringing people's sometimes angry, self-righteous, vindictive and socially intolerant comments down to the neighborhood level[36]." Several online comments about Nextdoor complain about how the forums become an avenue for hate speech, bigotry, and racist comments. Stung by such criticism, Nextdoor recently started blocking online racial profiling and hate speech[37].

The above examples show us three important aspects. First, the notion and definition of newsworthiness inhibits a media organization's ability to cover all the stories that it can otherwise

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[35] Webster, James G. The marketplace of attention: how audiences take shape in a digital age. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014. Page 154

[36] Ross, Martha. "Nextdoor: When a neighborhood website turns unneighborly." The Mercury News. August 12, 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.mercurynews.com/2015/09/01/nextdoor-when-a-neighborhood-website-turns-unneighborly/.

[37] Shahani, Aarti. "Social Network Nextdoor Moves To Block Racial Profiling Online." NPR. August 23, 2016. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2016/08/23/490950267/social-network-nextdoor-moves-to-block-racial-profiling-online.

look at. Second, social media and online forums have failed to influence media organizations'
story identification process, and third, alternate experiments that dispense with the necessity of a
journalist have not yielded any significant benefits. For these reasons, an alternative strategy is
necessary to recast the relationship between media and people and to put people in the driving seat.
The alternate scenario, when this strategy is applied, could be represented by the following graphic.
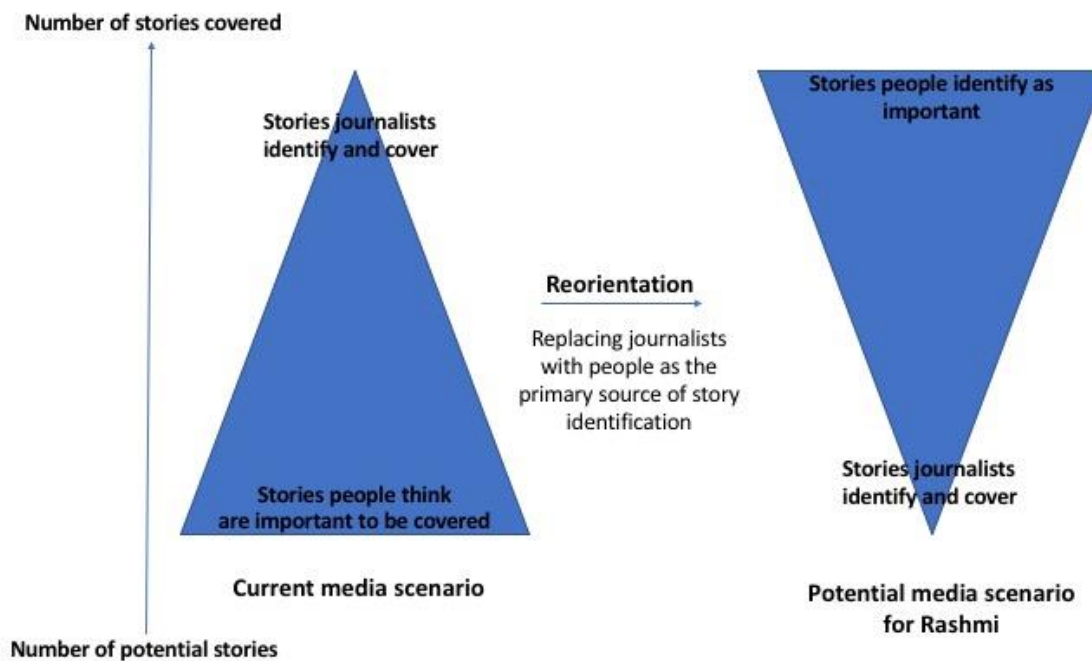
In the graph, the number of stories covered by a news organization is indicated by the arrow on
the left – the number of stories covered increases as we move from bottom to top. Triangles depict
the number of stories that can be/are being used at a given time, with base indicating the maximum,
and the apex indicating the least. The triangle on the left depicts the current scenario where
journalists pick and choose issues that they consider important from a pool of several potential
stories available in a community. The triangle on the right depicts the possible stories that can be
covered when we reorient the role of journalists from primary to secondary identifiers of the
stories.

It is important to note that by this reorientation, journalists don't lose their ability to pick and
choose a story to cover, they still choose a story, but the number of such stories will be far lesser
when compared with those identified by the people (advantages of this reorientation will be
discussed in depth in the third strategy). Journalists will also be tasked with covering stories that
fail to gather information through crowdsourcing. In other words, to an extent, asking people to

contribute story ideas is not a radically new concept. All news organizations, from highly centralized news structures like New York Times to decentralized structures like Patch, in principle, have avenues for people to reach out to them with story ideas. But most of the inputs are categorized as reader's mail, or are simply discarded for either of the following reasons,

1. Inputs seem incoherent
2. The highlighted issue may not be considered important enough
3. Journalists do not have time and band width to cover the issue
4. Issue does not fit in with the organization's focus
5. Issue conflicts with the journalist's/organization's world view

Though not exhaustive, it is important to keep these reasons in mind as they have potential implications on a reorganized operational structure.

1. Inputs seem incoherent: Sorting through reader's mail, or through social media posts, it is common to see rambling posts, which drone-on to make simple points. One of the implication for a journalist would be to bear with the volume and identify the central point of an input. It is, however, not an alien concept for the journalists, as bringing coherence to an issue is their primary duty. This aspect will be covered in depth in the next element of strategy.

2. The highlighted issue may not be considered important enough: This aspect has a greater significance as I would propose that this journalistic privilege should be scrapped. Rather than a journalist being the final judge of what is important and what is not, it should be the people who decide what is important and what is not. There are a few potential implications when this aspect is implemented.

   2.1. The question of newsworthiness, as is currently understood, will be challenged. This challenge, again, is not new. Social media has already challenged it resulting in the reorientation of their focus by the news media organizations. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, said that "A squirrel dying in the front of your house may be more relevant to your interests right now than people dying in Africa[38]." Webster points out that this statement is an illustration of a larger phenomenon called 'the first law of geography', which stipulates that, "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more

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[38] Webster, James G. The marketplace of attention: how audiences take shape in a digital age. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014. Page 46

related than distant things[39]." In their scramble for attention and catching eye-balls, several news organizations, like Buzzfeed, have already started covering stories, that traditional journalism would not have deemed to be newsworthy.

2.2. Journalists, like all subjective beings, have their own biases and oversights. It can sometimes prove difficult for journalists to forego these biases and oversights. The best way to overcome this aspect would be to automate the collation of inputs. This aspect will be discussed below while discussing the possible plan of implementation.

2.3. Like journalists it is also important for the media organization itself to be community centric.

3. Journalists do not have time and band width to cover the issue: Acting as the sole gatekeepers, journalists are always flooded with information and have several story ideas to juggle, resulting in a perpetual demand on the journalists, both physically and mentally. They also face time and resource constraints in entertaining new story ideas. As a journalist, I found that it's not just a phenomenon affecting me, most of my friends and colleagues faced similar problems and we had to take a choice, and we usually chose the stories that we thought were most pressing. One of the main aim of Rashmi is to address this problem. Because of its importance, this aspect will be covered in depth in the third strategy.

4. Issue does not fit in with the organization's focus: As explained above, it is important for the organization to clearly state its focus and ensure that it keeps community in the center of it.

5. Issue conflicts with the journalist's/organization's world view: Again, as discussed above this can be a pertinent issue and it must be dealt with carefully.

Implications for Rashmi
What I did

Before we ventured out in Attappadi, like any good journalistic endeavor, we met top brass in both official and political circles to find out their perspective about the issues that people in the area face. We also reached out to academics, experts, and activists working in the area and asked them

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[39] Ibid

to share their impression about the problems and issues that people face in Attappadi. All of them shared their perspectives and problems that they thought needs immediate addressing.

After a week of consultations, I thought that I now had a general overview of the area and enough information to walk into the field confidently. Based on this information, we decided that our initial focus should be on two issues – water scarcity, and problems with government-issued ration supplies, and identified the hamlets which faced these problems. This was the classic journalistic approach.

But when I ventured on ground, partly because of the language problem, and partly because of the curiosity, I asked only three questions (in this order) – (i) What issues were they facing? (ii) How do they think they can address this problem? (iii) What did they do in their spare time?

Once we covered all the identified villages, we came back, asked our student volunteers to translate the videos and upload them into an excel spreadsheet. The columns we used were – name of the person, place/hamlet, issue they were talking about, and the actual translation. As our questions were kept deliberately open-ended, the responses were spread over several issues.

Once we translated all the information, we set out to aggregate the responses we got according to the issues, and to our surprise, people did not talk about either of the problems that we identified based on our earlier consultations with the officials and others.

The learning

The key take way from this experience was that the issues people wanted to raise was different and they were looking for an avenue to talk about those issues.

How to translate this learning into operations?

To avoid recurrence of similar experiences that most media organizations and newsrooms face, I believe that Rashmi should adopt a unique three-layered operational plan. As will be explained in the next strategy, one of the main features of this venture is to let people directly contribute about any issues they face. The venture should have a centralized, separate data gathering and processing

center where the inputs from the people are logged into a spreadsheet and are sorted according to the issue and the location from which the input/complaint is being logged.

Once the data is segregated, journalists can compare the number of inputs an issue is receiving and can prioritize their news cycle. The policy of the organization should be clear, the issue that gets more number of inputs should be covered immediately in the upcoming programs. What about the issues that fail to get more number of inputs? Rather than relegating such issues to dustbin, as is the practice in a regular newsroom, the organizational policy should be that those issues should be investigated by the contributors and journalists themselves. If journalists and contributors fail to get any further information, the input should be put out in the public, within a specified amount of time, approximately two weeks, explaining them the issue, and should be encouraged to contribute about it. And only when an issue fails to get enough response from people after all these steps, that it should be relegated to a status of non-stories. To ensure that none of the stories face discrimination at any level – gathering, collation, translation, and investigation, each input should be time stamped and those handling it should be answerable to the editors in a time-bound manner. I believe that this type of a thorough three-layered approach ensures that all issues are treated with equal respect and will essentially democratize the way issues are chosen and covered.

The biggest cost incurred in implementing this strategy is during the phases of translation (since the inputs will inadvertently be in local language, which may or may not be English) and collation. But these costs can be minimized by taking the advantage of crowd translation services offered by hosting sites like YouTube. With economies of scale, technological advances, and development of advanced and accurate automated translation services, these costs can be reduced as the project matures.

Strategy 2: Avenues for the people to freely contribute while maintaining well-defined, minimal, and transparent gatekeeping by the media organizations

This strategy deliberates about the creation of possible avenues for people to freely contribute their news, views, and opinions. To do this, I foresee a few possible bottlenecks based on three criteria – Structural, Attitudinal, and Operational. Let us look at each of these aspects and analyze how they can be addressed, based on current examples, and future possibilities.

Structural bottlenecks

When we point out that mainstream media does not allow direct participation of people, it will be unfair to heap total blame on the organizations themselves. Most of the bottlenecks are due to the structural issues. Take for example, the structure of newsrooms, even though most newsrooms are trying their best in making themselves flexible and encouraging people to participate through social media, phone-ins, emails, and snail mails, they still have limitations that inhibit people from contributing freely. As discussed in the above strategy, there is a need to reorient the newsrooms while dealing with the information being provided by people, and we will cover this aspect in operational bottlenecks. However, considering that this significant hurdle is overcome by reorienting the organization to cover any issue being provided by the people without value judgement, there would still be infrastructural bottlenecks.

Infrastructural bottlenecks

One of the biggest hurdle that any media organization should overcome is the medium or platform through which people can contribute. Each media organization deals with this issue according to the medium or platform it operates in. For example, print media encourages people to contribute through physical or electronic mails and phone calls, radio stations, like Radio Okapi in Democratic Republic of Congo, and CG Net Swara in India encourage people to contribute through phone-ins. TV channels these days are increasingly accepting videos shot by people, and finally, digital natives, like Buzzfeed and others, take multimedia contributions through various mediums, be it a smartphone, social media post, or an online contribution.

But a venture like Rashmi faces a typical conundrum as there is a need to establish the nature of this venture in the first place before we address the aspects of contribution. What delivery modes should it embrace to reach out to a small community? So, let us look at the options we have in the first place. To operate in a locality, say for example in Attappadi, it is not possible for us to request the residents of Attappadi to use a platform that is most convenient and cost-effective to us, which would obviously be the online platform, primarily because people in that area do not have access

to internet. Assuming they have good internet connection and all the associated capabilities (comprising of gadgets, education, and intent) of consuming digital media, do we still ask them to migrate to our camp and participate in our programs online? To ensure maximum participation, I believe, we need to reach out to the people in a medium or platform that they are comfortable with. Our earlier research showed that maximum people in Attappadi watch TV and hence we created video as our final product. In future, when we decide to expand to a different locality, it will not be possible for the organization to bank on its already established capabilities. Whenever we venture into a new locality, we have to conduct a fresh research to identify media consumption patterns there and customize the final product matching those consumption patterns. In other words, as each story, in its outlook and framing, is contextual to the concerns, issues, and problems being faced in a community, the choice of delivery platform should also be contextual and evolve with what is available within the community. Hence there is a need to acquire an ability to create platform-agnostic content for each story.

This might sound complex, but it is a simple process. While we are creating a video, same footage can be used to create a podcast/radio program, and while we are making a storyboard, we can write an article that can be read online, and use photos/still frames from videos to enrich the article.

This is not a new practice and several TV channels, like Al Jazeera, CNN, and others are already doing this when they post their video programs online. Legacy print media organizations like New York Times and Washington Post are also experimenting with video and multimedia content on their websites and mobile apps.

While most media organizations are dabbling with several new platforms to reach out to more number of people, the unique challenge for Rashmi would be to walk an extra mile to reach people in a medium they are comfortable with. Once the platform-agnostic content is ready, it can be broadcasted to people in the medium they want - through TV, radio, hosting of content on a website, audio and video content streamed on smartphones through hosting sites like SoundCloud and YouTube, played as podcasts, made available through social media, or allow people to dial a toll-free number to listen to the previous episodes of a podcast/radio program. To truly reach out to people, we should also have an ability to send out SMS messages to those who have basic

phones or live in places without proper internet connections. This final capability is important as smartphone penetration across the world is still very poor[40].

Once Rashmi is established as a platform-agnostic media organization, there is also a need to allow people to contribute in any medium that suits them. With the similar logic, and infrastructure, that we used in trying to establish Rashmi as a platform agnostic organization, we should also encourage people to contribute in the formats they are comfortable with or have access to – ranging from a simple SMS message from a basic mobile phone, to phone-ins, to uploading of user-shot videos.

The need for such versatility in options to contribute is because, dependence on only a few modes of information contribution can result in those modes acting as natural gatekeepers. For example, if we only prefer contribution of videos shot by people using their own mobiles, then those holding the smartphones will automatically assume the role of gatekeepers.

This brings us to the question about the ability of people to shoot a video using smartphones. I was personally skeptical about the possibility of general people, that too those from tribal hamlets, shooting a usable video. To test this out, I made a simple rule when I went on the field during the pilot project - videos should be shot either by our local student volunteers or local people themselves using low-end android phones. The result proved to me that one-and-half-decade of acclimatization to mobile phones has made people at the least comfortable with composing and sending text messages, making phone calls, and shooting videos, and that given an avenue, it will not be difficult for people to contribute to the programs.

Attitudinal bottlenecks

Overcoming infrastructural bottlenecks is the easiest of all three hurdles, but attitudinal bottlenecks are difficult to tackle. Adapting available technologies, we can make Rashmi a truly platform-agnostic media organization in both information collection and dissemination, but would it ensure participation of people?

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[40] Dobush, Grace. "How Mobile Phones Are Changing the Developing World." CTA. July 27, 2015. Accessed December 30, 2016. https://www.cta.tech/News/Blog/Articles/2015/July/How-Mobile-Phones-Are-Changing-the-Developing-Worl.aspx.

Reluctance of users to contribute

Out There News founder Paul Eedle observes that the value of his platform is to encourage people to contribute who otherwise do not contribute. However, he speaks about the reluctance of most users to contribute as "(most people) wouldn't imagine that their voices are worth hearing[41]." I found similar reluctance towards sharing their views among the people when I went on-ground in Attappadi. While most people were enthusiastic to talk, and explain us the problems they face, they invariably shied away when we asked them to shoot a video of what they were saying. Their reluctance was three-fold, while some were (like Eedle pointed out) not sure if their voices can matter, others were afraid of consequences and wanted to avoid them, others were angry that their earlier contributions did not give them any better result and hence were dismissive of our attempts to approach them.

Possible solutions

I overcame these problems with three different tactics and found them to be very effective. The first was to ensure that we do not approach people directly, but allow our student volunteers to cultivate people. This helped tribes in Attappadi identifying themselves with the project and consequently softened their stance. The second tactic was to encourage people to own up their own problems and in case of controversial content, we promised anonymity (though we did not receive any controversial content as one episode was not enough to gain their trust). Third most important tactic was to ask them to share their problems, and what they thought could be the best possible solution to that problem.

Incorporating these three tactics into Rashmi's operations, I believe that while professional journalists are indispensable to the project, it is the local contributors, either permanent or selected from a shifting population, who would form the backbone of the venture. Journalists will work in close tandem with these contributors, who are also our on-ground representatives, to validate the incoming information and to fill the gaps in a story. I believe that giving the option of anonymity as the first option will encourage people to provide information without the associated responsibilities. So, as a policy, we should discourage the practice of providing anonymity to every contribution. That said, anonymity should be given to those whose life, property, or reputation

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[41] Couldry, Nick, and James Curran. *Contesting media power: alternative media in a networked world*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Page 50

might be in danger due to their contributions. Without much of a debate, I believe it is best to follow traditional journalism's code of conduct, where people can be provided with anonymity only when they demonstrate a tangible danger. Also, like a proper newsroom ethic, anonymity should be granted only once the story goes public, and the journalist, editor, and senior editor handling the story should know the identity of the person contributing, and should take active part in validating the information. This engagement, I believe, will also help journalists to connect with the people and area they are working with.

The third tactic is the most important one, in that the focus of inquiry should be on the problem-identification, and solution-generation, rather than on blame-fixing and complaining (more about it in operational bottlenecks).

Two-Step theory and activism

While the project does not envisage a possibility of acting as an activist's tool, we should strongly encourage activists to participate in the deliberations. Explaining the concept of Two-Step theory in the context of a passive audience, Wilson, points out that "[two-step theory is about the] movement of information through interpersonal networks, from media to people (opinion leaders) and from there to other people[42]."

For any participatory media venture it is important to rope in opinion leaders and activists as they are the prime movers in a community. They are also easy to activate, and as Eedle points out, they will always find a way to contribute their views[43]. However, it should be ensured that people are neither overshadowed nor intimidated by the presence of these opinion leaders and activists.

Operational bottlenecks

Operational bottlenecks can manifest in three different ways – (i) In the process of encouraging people to participate, (ii) in the process of ensuring credible and transparent gatekeeping, (iii) and in the process of handling verified and unverified data.

(i)   The process of encouraging people to participate

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[42] Wilson, Tony. *Understanding media users: from theory to practice*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

[43] Couldry, Nick, and James Curran. *Contesting media power: alternative media in a networked world*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003. Page 50
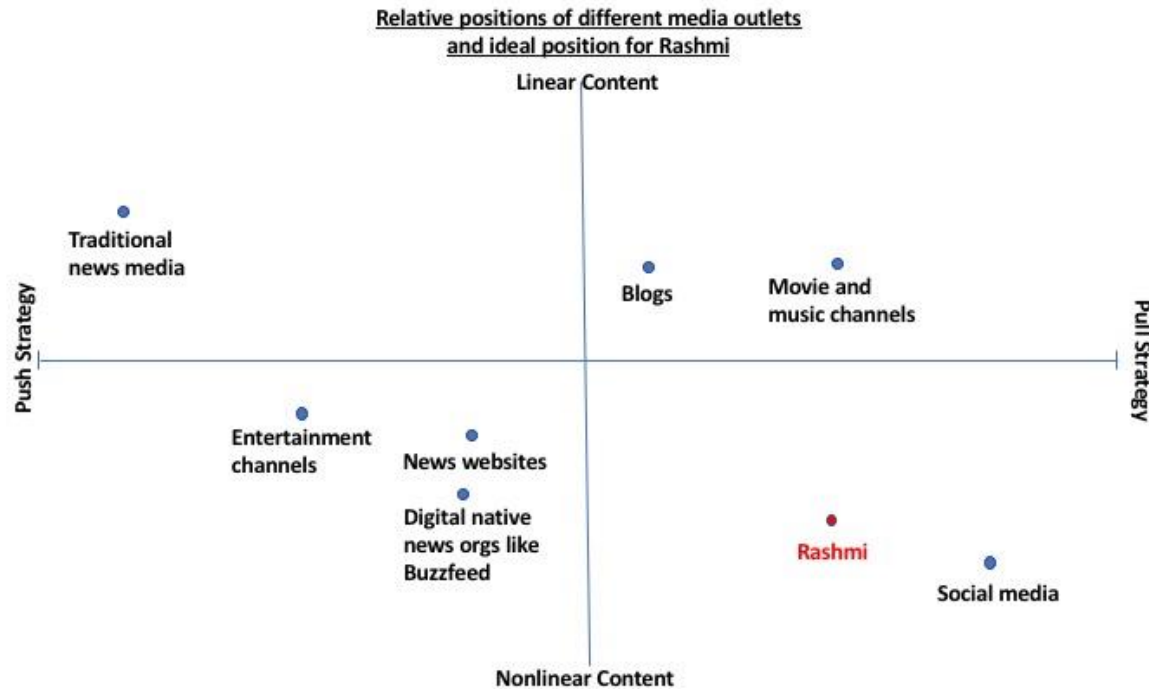
Push vs Pull strategies

Media organizations often adopt push and pull strategies to gain audience, as it is the audience that gives media its power, influence, and ultimately, the ability to make money[44]. While traditional medial is often associated with push strategy, in that audience consume media organization's products through linear platforms like TV, radio, and newspapers, they also attract audience through pull strategies, like live programs with phone-in facilities, soliciting reader's comments and responses, and interactive online programs (nonlinear platforms). It is this interactivity that encourages people to contribute in media programs[45]. It is important to position a media organization in the scale between push and pull strategies, as this position has an impact on the operational aspects of the venture. One of the important trade-off in deciding between push vs pull strategy is the amount of advertisement revenue that we need to spend to gain audience. In push strategy, we usually spend more money on advertisements as to gain audience, we need to first reach them. In pull strategy, this cost is reduced and due to its ability to pull audience towards it, these organizations and programs also command better advertisement revenues.

Through the following graph, adapted from Webster's book (2014 Page 68), I tried to depict the relative positions occupied by different media organization and the optimal position that I envision for this venture.

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[44] Webster, James G. The marketplace of attention: how audiences take shape in a digital age. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014. Page 73-74

[45] Ibid, Page 67

**Relative positions of different media outlets
and ideal position for Rashmi**

Linear Content

Traditional
news media

Blogs

Movie and
music channels

Push Strategy

Pull Strategy

Entertainment
channels

News websites

Digital native
news orgs like
Buzzfeed

Rashmi

Social media

Nonlinear Content

I envisage Rashmi to depend more on pull strategy based on two aspects – the first law of geography, and identification of people with the problems and solutions being discussed in the programs.

As explained earlier, the first law of geography states that nearer things are more related than distant things, and since the venture aims to cover issues that are closer to home, I believe that this aspect will provide a natural pull. Another aspect is closely linked with the first law of geography. Since it will be easy for a person to relate with the problem being discussed in a story, and the solution being proposed by others have a direct impact on their day-to-day experiences, people will experience a greater pull towards the venture. To achieve this effect, however, it is important for the venture to be available on the medium that is most popular with that community, bringing us back to the importance of platform-agnostic content for this venture.

Media Choice

It is also important to understand the concept of media choice as Rashmi will be one of the many available avenues for the people to engage with. While this capstone does not permit me to delve on this aspect for longer, it is important to understand that a person's choice to consume a media product is dependent on several factors including a rational choice (available information is either

useful or gratifying), preferences and tastes, selective exposure (a choice out of a given basket), or as a marker of their social identity[46].

User Dilemma

Understanding media choice brings us to the question about User Dilemma. How does a person cope with media choice? Webster explains that media users adopt different strategies to cope with the impending decision of which media product to choose. The strategies are; bounded rationality (where users know what they want to consume), repertoires (choosing limited number of places to look for information – for example using certain apps, following few friends, or using news aggregators), and heuristics (using thumb rules in choosing media, based on recommendations, importance, credibility, and quality, among others)[47].

For Rashmi to become successful, it should, in mid-to-long-term, gain trust of the people, provide relevant and accurate information, and gain acceptance, becoming a part of day-to-day life of a community.

    (ii)   Process of ensuring credible and transparent gatekeeping

While it is important to ensure that people participate, it is also vital for the organization to provide credible and transparent gatekeeping from the day one. While the venture aims to be participatory in its maximum possible aspects, there are two main components that will ensure a credible gatekeeping – incorporation of problem-identification and solution oriented approach, two levels of screening before the rudimentary information is put out in public.

Problem-identification and solution oriented approach

While I do acknowledge that it is difficult for many people to identify a problem and clearly articulate it, and much less, propose a solution to that problem, I believe that it is important that this approach is standardized in the operations as it will eliminate a lot of inappropriate and inconsequential comments. Instituting this approach will also help guide a productive discussion among the people and will also help journalists in framing a story.

Two levels of screening

Since the information we receive will invariably be in a local language, it will be first translated into English and collated into a datasheet, to help us identify the issues being raised by the people.

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[46] Ibid, Page27
[47] Ibid, Pages 35-37

This aspect provides the first level of screening as the translator (either in-house or a crowd-sourced) can raise the red flag. The second level of screening comes into play when the input is reviewed by the journalist responsible for the area in his/her routine investigation of developing issues and stories. Only after going through these steps, the received information will be presented as unverified/raw input to the community members inviting them to share their views about it. As a policy, Rashmi, in early and mid-term of its operations, will desist from being a breaking-news venture, giving its journalists, contributors, translators, and editors, enough time to incorporate best practices.

    (iii)   The process of handling verified and unverified data

The online repository, where all the received data will be hosted will have four sections

        (a) First section will host all the inputs received by the organization and will be available to only contributors, journalists, translators, and editors. This is the phase where the videos will be translated and collated.

        (b) Second section will be the videos/inputs that have been translated and collated but are yet to be verified by the journalist, contributors, and public (more on this in the third strategy – time and resources for journalists to dig deeper into the stories)

        (c) Third section will contain the stories produced by the organization based on the inputs, this section will also have options for the people to contribute/respond to a story directly as inputs and not as comments. These inputs will automatically land in the first section and await translation and collation. I believe that this is a very important step as it will not just reduce the practices of trolling and creation of community information trash bins, it will also encourage people to be more responsive and constructive in their comments – needless to say, these inputs will also be subjected to the problem-identification and solution oriented approach.

        (d) Fourth section will contain the videos for which there was inadequate information available (even after the journalists try from their side to fill the gaps) and would request further inputs from the people.

This elaborate framework could be perceived as a bottleneck in free and fair participation of people. A question may arise as; why can't people post directly on discussion threads and participate on it? It indeed is very convenient for us to allow people to post directly, and open forums can be true representation of community participation. Then why should there be a delay? Our experience with decades of online forums and social media pages show that unmediated discussions always descend to the absolute worst that we are capable of, hence this trade-off. This framework can also face another pushback. The time and resources needed to do this could be high. But so is maintaining a newsroom. For me the question is one of scale rather than the time and resources. I believe that the cost of this framework will come down as the current available technologies mature, we leverage crowdsourcing for translation requirements, and we expand to more than one center kicking-in the effect of economies of scale.

The reason for instituting this framework is also because it will help institute the problem-identification, solution-oriented approach. For example, let us assume that a tribal woman/man/child provides an input that is not in this format, the first flag can be raised by the translator. Taking que, journalist can reach back to that person to clarify what they wanted to highlight and rectify the input. If the translator is not in-house and does not raise the flag, journalist responsible for the area can still spot it while s/he is reviewing the inputs and follow up on the subject.

There is a third distinct possibility with this approach. Since all inputs will be considered as fresh inputs, the need for a code of conduct can be dispensed off. I believe it is important because the presence of a code of conduct can be construed as a limitation imposed by the organization. Also, a code of conduct will start with the assumption that people will behave badly and it has to be tackled. Whereas this framework, we can discourage individuals from irresponsible behavior, not discourage them from participating.

One final caution that the organization should keep in mind is that this framework should not be abused by the journalists, contributors, or translators. To ensure that, each individual input should be timestamped and its fate should be available to both the person contributing (as in, when an input is received and is either not adhering the problem-solution framework, or is irreverent, that person should be able to see why it is still pending) and to the editors overseeing the operations. The authority to delete/declare an input obsolete should be vested only to those who are in the

higher positions in the organization and the person who's input was discarded should be able to see why his input was discarded.

Strategy 3: Time and resource independence for the journos to dig deeper into the stories

By working on previous strategies, we reach an interesting position. Assuming that the new organization is now ready to take up the stories as identified by the people, people are freely sharing their problems, possible solutions, and opinions, and finally we have systems and frameworks in place that will help us translate, collate and identify the issues, we now have three challenges – what will be the structure of the organization (aka who is considered as a journalist), how is the received input validated, and finally what are the roles of journalists. Let us take each component individually to construct the final picture.

Possible organizational structure of the venture

Before we think of possible operational structure of the venture, let us take stock of the ground we want to cover carefully. While Attappadi is the focus of this capstone, please bear in mind that this analysis can be related to most of the smaller communities across the world.

Like most communities, Attappadi has its share of influencers, opinion makers, enthusiasts (people who participate in community activities actively), and silent population. To arrive at the typical topography of Attappadi, let us add a layer comprising three different languages spoken by three tribes residing in the area and two main regional languages spoken by the settlers. Over this there is this the aspect of 192 hamlets spread over about 288 square miles (745 square kilometers) out of which there is about 96 square miles (249 square kilometers) protected forest area. Some of these 192 hamlets are not accessible by motor-able roads.

For starters, especially for a media organization, it is important to have someone who understands all the languages spoken in the area. Since it is difficult for us to get a trained journalist who would know all these languages, we have to rope in a local candidate to do the job. I also realized, such a person should essentially be a woman, as women usually have better access into a community – lets call such a person a 'local representative' who are under Rashmi's payroll. Apart from

employing one or two such local representatives, we also should bring the enthusiasts and activists onboard. It is these people who will provide the bulk of information. Since there is usually a sizeable number of people who fall into this category, we can also create a pool of people who can contribute and help with the stories, let us call them contributors. Local groups comprising of youth, women, and others fit in this category. Ideally, because they know the language and are from the community, our representatives should be responsible in handling the pool of contributors directly.

Above this should be a journalist, who may or may not know the local languages. This journalist should be able to actively liaison with the representative/s, contributors, and other actors and stakeholders like officials and politicians. This is because local officials and politicians may be reluctant to participate in the program directly and might need some form of direct handling and, at times, cajoling. Ideally each journalist should be able to handle at least three centers like Attappadi.

Above these journalists should be another layer of senior editors, who oversee the operations. In parallel to this is another branch comprising of audio and video editors who will create the programs.

Let us consider the responsibilities of these players in a simple table format

Position	Type	Primary responsibilities	Location	Interacts with
Contributors	Non-editorial	Actively participate in debates, help local representatives and journalist depending on the story, galvanize the community	On-ground (local resident)	Local representative, journalist, and senior editor
Local representative	Non-editorial	Act as a liaison between local people and journalist, verify the translations and content, identify the trends and developments in the locality, when necessary assist journalist in filling gaps	On-ground (local resident)	Journalist responsible for the area, contributors, senior editor
Journalist	Editorial	Collate the data and make the story board, find gaps and assist local	On-ground, but	People, contributors,

		representative and contributors to fill them, interact with people, contributors, and local representatives regularly, to find the pulse of the locality. Framing of stories, approaching different stakeholders when they do not actively contribute towards the story. Write the articles for the stories	(in the mid-to-long run) will be responsible for more than one center (not necessarily a local resident)	local representatives, senior editor, and audio/video editor
Senior editor	Editorial	Supervise journalists. Will be responsible for the production of the story and will be ultimately responsible for verification, framing, and multimedia component in any given locality.	In a central location/ main office (not necessarily a local resident)	Contributors, local representative, journalist and audio/video editor
Audio/video editor	Editorial	Make final product in different formats	Central location (not necessarily a local resident)	Journalist and senior editor

This categorization is not very different from any existing media organization. Most regional, national, and international media organization will have journalists who are supervised by senior editors and assisted by audio/video editors. They also employ local contributors and stringers. But the similarity with existing media structure ends here.

The important detail in this scheme is that the local representatives and contributors are categorized as non-editorial staff (not as journalists). The reason for this categorization is two-fold. A journalist or editorial staff is expected to be unbiased, supposed to understand the question of framing and adhere to editorial ethics, implying that they are expected to be impartial and unbiased. However, being residents of a place, local representatives and contributors are also stakeholders in any issue, and hence cannot be expected to adhere to the impartiality and unbiased observations. In other words, being subjective human beings living in a community and having a stake in the development of that locality, local representatives and contributors should have equal opportunity, when compared with other community members, to voice their own biases, preferences and perceptions. There is a growing demand to consider contributors as journalists. One of the primary reasons for this is press regulations. In most countries, journalists usually enjoy the legal protection and privileges when they cover a story[48]. However, I believe that there is a need to reorient the notion that general people can generate and contribute information without having to be labeled as a journalist. I believe that in a participatory media venture based in a small locality, it is important for the local representatives to blend into the community and not stand out as journalists.

Validation of received inputs

In the traditional media setup, the information received by a journalist is validated in four ways (i) the information is a known fact, for example the quarterly unemployment data from labor department, (ii) Somebody witnessed the developments, for example I saw that my neighbor's cat met with an accident, and I can corroborate that fact to a journalist, (iii) information is directly from an authority, for example town mayor/sheriff/representative declares that a crime occurred at some place, (iv) journalist digs information and validates its truth.

In all these aspects, journalists take the primary role in collation and validation of the information. But is it possible to tinker with the validation procedure? For that we should look at the nature of information and how it is validated. Validation of information was taken as a linear concept for a long time. It took an expert to validate a fact, and it was the responsibility of a journalist to track

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[48] Meyer, Robinson. "U.S. Court: Bloggers Are Journalists." The Atlantic. January 21, 2014. Accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/01/us-court-bloggers-are-journalists/283225/.

a relevant expert to validate that information. In this scenario, while journalists faced severe constraints in finding a reliable expert, on the flip side, only those experts who had access and connection to a journalist could contribute their knowledge. Advent of internet and consequent development of Wikipedia phenomenon and crowdsourcing information changed that game. Wikipedia convincingly demonstrated that with enough checks and balances, minimal but credible gatekeeping, and an active community, the latent knowledge in a community can be brought to light. More recently, initiatives like Ushahidi, also prove the same point, given a chance, people are willing to share what they know.

I believe that in this venture we can take social validation as a key verification process. The possible trajectory that social validation can take in the process of verifying an information provided by a person is shown in the following flowchart.
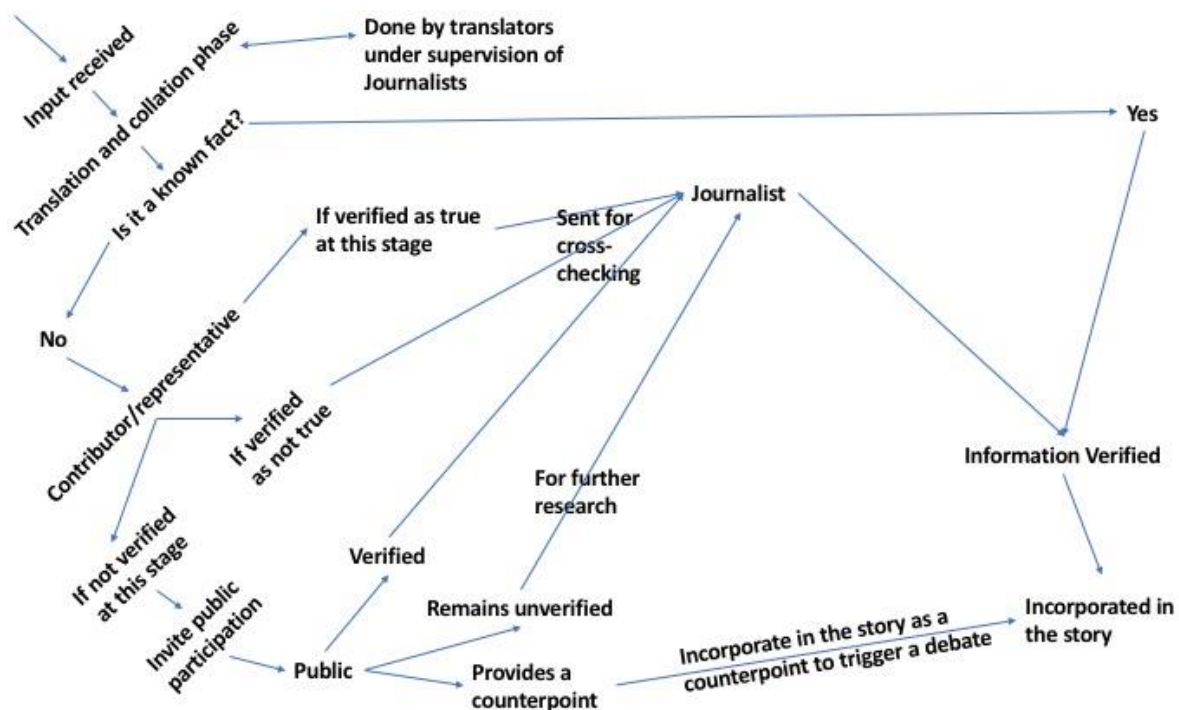
The flow chart could present itself as a complex jumble. But it makes two simple points (a) Primary role of the journalist is to supervise and crosscheck verifications done by translators, contributors, representatives, and/or public. Apart from this, they carry out traditional journalistic verification once all other actors fail to ascertain the veracity of an information. (b) Public have more than two options – they can verify and validate an information, they can fail to verify it (in the sense they

can opt as for 'I don't know' option), or they can give a counterpoint. (As a quick side note, the status 'verified' does not just mean that information was validated as correct, an information can also be conclusively verified as wrong.)

Journalist's role will be looked at closely in the next section, but I would like to deliberate on the third aspect that public can provide – counterpoint.

Story as a work-in-progress

Most media organizations approach a story as a complete unit. Each story covered by media should have a structure, preferably in an inverted pyramid shape where the most newsworthy part should be explained first, followed by the body, general information linked with the story, and conclusion[49]. But this approach will be challenged by the above flowchart in two important points. (a) when an unverified information is presented to the public inviting their inputs, and (b) when someone gives a counterpoint.

> (a) The act of putting forward a section of information to the public before it is verified creates the possibility of people participating in the story creation itself, rather than just passively consuming it. Since the issue will be about a problem in their own locality, it also provides avenues for public to participate in a debate about that problem.
>
> (b) Counterpoints, by nature are in variance with the main information for which verification is sought. By combining both the information and counterpoint in a story, we will neither deny nor confirm the original information, but will only provide an avenue to the people to deliberate on that subject, triggering greater community engagement.

Most media organizations invite public responses at the end of their stories, and carry those responses in subsequent coverage of that issue. However, operational plan for Rashmi should go a step further and treat all stories as work-in-progress, in that none of the story should be considered as an open and shut case. Through this policy, I believe, we can achieve two distinct goals, provide an avenue for people to engage with a story at all stages, and rope-in community members in identification and validation of their own news.

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[49] Fischer, Andreas, Gunnel Tottie, Hans Martin. Lehmann, and Udo Fries. Text types and corpora: studies in honour of Udo Fries. Tübingen: G. Narr, 2002. Page 95

Journalist's role

This brings us to the envisaged role of a journalist in this venture. If information is collated from the public, most of the validation is done through social validation, and community members are roped in to identify and involve with stories at all stages, what are the roles that a journalist should take?

The idea is not to disenfranchise a journalist, but enable him/her with organizational and informational support. Earlier in this paper, I identified that journalists in current scenario tend to cover only a few stories when compared with the possible stories available in a community. It will be erroneous to say that they ignore the possible stories on purpose. Charged with the main responsibility of newsgathering, journalists have precious little time, resources, energies, and capabilities to cover all the story leads that they get. And one of the primary aim of this venture is to free them from this task and help them concentrate on more serious journalistic work.

I assume journalists in this venture will wear a few different hats. Like in a traditional media organization, one of the primary responsibility of journalists at Rashmi will be to assume the important editorial role of framing a story/issue. They will also be tasked to identify the gaps and help/guide the representatives and contributors in filling them. Apart from these, journalists play central role in validating the verification process and will conduct independent research about an issue when all other actors fail to establish the validity of an input. This might look like journalists have a lot on their plate, but assuming each locality produces a 20-minute program per week, (comprising of about four issues in each program) and we desist from breaking news segment, journalists will have plenty of time.

While these functions are essentially supportive in nature, one of the key roles they take up is investigative journalism. Each month, or at least once in every three months (depending on the amount of work they do in the supportive roles), journalists will be encouraged to produce an investigative journalistic piece about the issues they identify as affecting those localities. In this endeavor, they will work closely with the senior editor supervising them. The purpose of this is to tackle controversial issues that affect people, but community members are either reluctant or are afraid to broach the subject.

Coverage of investigative stories will also improve the credibility of Rashmi in a community, and will give an avenue for the journalists to do serious journalistic endeavor.

There is one last question that needs to be addressed before we close this section, what will be the incentives for people, contributors and representatives to participate in this venture. Let us look at a few suggested incentives for these categories of people separately.

(i) Representatives: Representatives of Rashmi will be on our payroll, so this question may not apply to them. But there are additional incentives for them to participate, one would be an opportunity to participate in their own community and play an important role in resolving the problems they face through community effort. Another incentive is the building up of social capital, and finally, representatives also have a chance to get a promotion as a journalist. I envisage that fresh undergraduate students, youngsters, and women looking for a job in their own communities will be keen to play this role.

(ii) Contributors: Since most of the contributors will be either activists, or, are already active members of smaller community-based groups, the group dynamics will encourage them in participating in the venture. If finances permit, I also plan to provide incentives based on their contributions, for example paying about INR 100-200 (equivalent of about USD 1.5-3) each time their contribution is used in a story.

(iii) People: people will have a variety of reasons to participate. The foremost reason would be that they will get an avenue to air their problems and deliberate about the probable solutions. Public participation will also increase as the venture gets traction and people start identifying benefits with their engagement.

Strategy 4: News as a medium to generate debate rather than as an avenue for entertainment

In last few pages, we looked extensively at the key features envisaged in this operational plan. While these features can be oriented for different purposes, one of the key organizational policy should be to consider news as a tool to generate debate among the public. There are several features in the operational plan that will help us achieve this focus. One of them is the adherence to problem-oriented and solution-identification approach. By encouraging people to share their views in this format, we can ensure that they remain engaged and participate in the debate.

Another aspect is the unique verification process sought to apply in the operations of Rashmi. By combining various aspects that are already being used in several media organization, like

technological automation in translation and collation of incoming information, and crowdsourcing verification process, and adopting innovative aspects like two-step verification, using counterpoints (even if they are yet to be unverified), and finally assuring and implementing the policy of constantly working on a story and releasing updated versions periodically to show the progress, are all designed to trigger a debate in the community members.

Another aspect is considering all stories as work-in-progress. By this simple reorientation, we stop looking at each story as an end, and start looking at it as part of a continuous evolution of a subject/topic. We also stop discarding information that we cannot verify immediately, and help people actively participate in a story at all stages.

Used and Unused information

The final question I can envisage in this strategy is what do we do with unused data? In any story, assuming people are freely contributing about an issue, there will always be information that is repeated by several people and we may not be able to use all that information in making a program of less than 5 minutes. What do we do with the information that is not used?

Using unused information

This posed a serious challenge to me. In the current operational phase, we do not plan to own a TV channel, or radio station, or a newspaper. The best possible avenue to host the unused information is online. Like any online discussion forum, we can host the content in four categories that we discussed in earlier section and let people freely view and contribute towards the second, third, and fourth categories, first being accessible to only translators, journalists and local representatives. So when a person visits a story, he/she can see the used and unused bits of information.

This could be easily managed in a society that has a good internet connection. But what about an area like Attappadi where internet penetration is low? The best possible avenue in such scenarios is to ensure that people are told about the statistics, like how many are talking about which subjects in the program, and through SMS push messages. They can also be updated about the information when they call a toll-free number.

There can be other uses of unused information. It can be used as a data mine for in-house research about the topic and use in future programs, and as a sellable content to both media houses that would be interested in covering a subject, and organizations like NGOs and corporation that need validation of their investments in the area (more about this in next strategy).

Unused data can also be used to understand a dominant trend in a community and it can be used as a leverage towards triggering debate in a community.

Strategy 5: Monetary independence

This is one strategy that all media organizations would like to get it right. But several scholars have shown that for a media organization, true monetary independence is a chimera, the more we chase it, the farther is runs. Traditionally media organizations have banked on two types of revenue models to finance their operations, the subscription model, and the advertisement model. To encourage greater participation, this venture cannot choose the subscription model to finance its operations. This leaves us primarily banking on ad-revenue.

However, I think one of the important aspects in maintaining a modicum of financial independence will be to tap different revenue streams. By spreading the revenue streams, the venture can reduce the influence of any one financial supporter on the operations. At this scale that we are operating, there can be four major revenue streams – CSR support, sponsorships, local advertisements, and cross-selling of content.

(i) CSR Support: Donors both in the private sector as well as NGOs invest heavily for development activities. However, the impact of these funds in the day-to-day lives has always been unclear. Currently, there are several objective impact monitoring mechanisms including surveys and econometric analysis. Rashmi can provide a subjective understanding of both the issue and impact of development activities in resolving the issue. Rashmi, thus, can provide transparency and connect the beneficiaries directly with the donors for which we charge a fee.

(ii) Sponsorships: Large corporations usually sponsor shows in national media or in local events like college festivals. Through this venture's focus on hyperlocal areas, we can provide the sponsors with an opportunity to get exposure to local communities

(iii)   Local Advertisements: Currently local service providers like painters, plumbers, local businesses post printed ads. Such providers can now advertise via Rashmi's programs

(iv)   Cross-selling Content: National and regional mass media players can use on-ground content from Rashmi to enhance their content for which we can charge them on pay-as-you-go basis

Strategy 6: Editorial independence

For any media company, editorial independence is sacrosanct and Rashmi aims to achieve the best of it. This can be achieved by incorporating traditional features adopted by media organizations like strong firewalls between editorial and non-editorial departments in the organization, and a quest for financial independence through a wider array of financial resources to reduce.

Assuming, the effects of financial considerations on editorial independence are tackled through organizational setup, it will be safe to consider editorial independence as a work-in-progress in any media organization, in that it is a dynamic aspect that needs constant defending and tinkering by the editorial staff and board.

However, the question I deliberate in this strategy is this - editorial independence from whom and for what?

To understand this, we need to see how editorial independence was defined in the first place. For most theorists, editorial independence is often juxtaposed against governmental controls, the implication being, absence of government control is taken as a measure for editorial independence. Based in a hyper-local community, and adopting a participatory media framework, one of the key aspect for this venture, however, is to ensure that media is responsible to the people. Combining these two aspects, I believe, for a venture like Rashmi, most aspirational value of editorial independence will be characterized by minimal regulatory control, but at the same time, balanced by its responsibility towards people.

The following chart tries to position Rashmi in a three-way people-media-government framework.
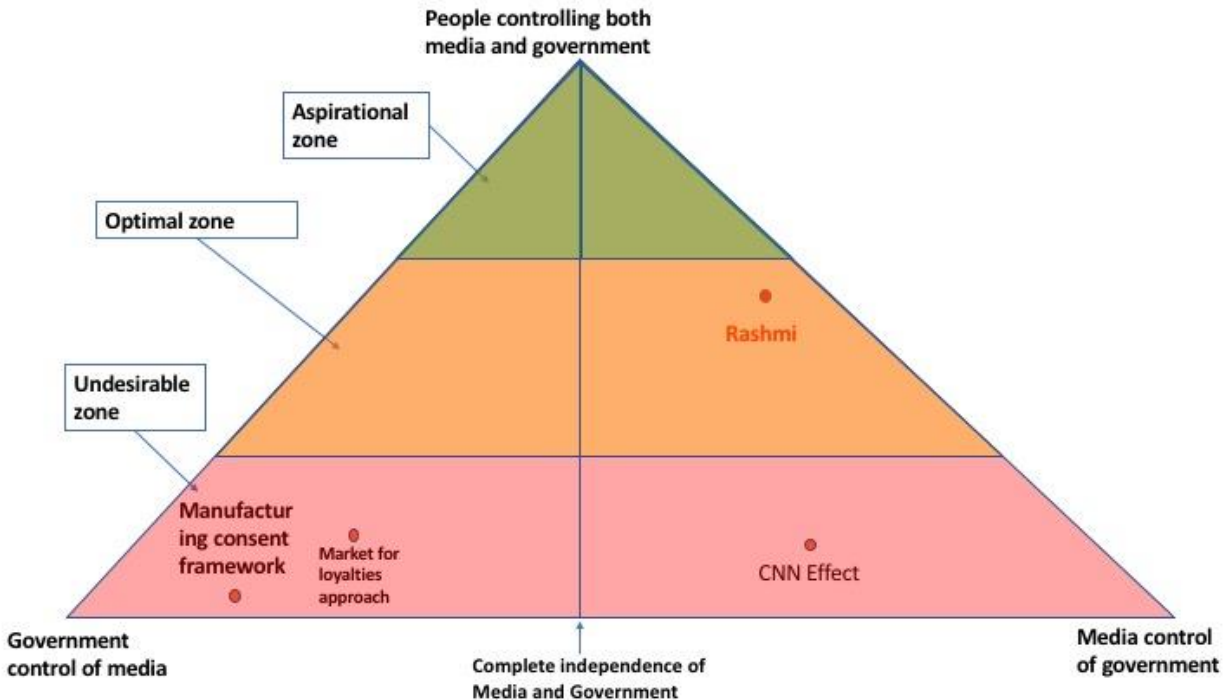
The graph shows where different media organization fall according to different theoretical frameworks. The dynamic played out by most theoretical frameworks is between government control of media, and media control of government as two extremes. But when it comes to Rashmi, I think we should bring in a third component, people controlling both media and government. In such a scenario, Rashmi will exist closer to the people controlling the venture.

I also tried to look at three different zones in this graphic – aspirational, optimal, and undesirable. The reason for these zones is that, though the main aim of this venture is to put people in the drivers' seat, given the scope and nature of the venture, the role journalists play, and the social and political dynamics governing a community, the possibility of people controlling both media and government is remote.

That said, Rashmi should aspire to be in the optimal zone where it has less governmental controls on it but is primarily accountable to the community members it is catering to.

Conclusion

Through the journey of this capstone we looked at how we can try to reorient a media organization towards greater civic engagement. While some aspects of the operational plan are already existing in the current media organizations, others were modified to suit this project, and then there are some innovative concepts, which I hope will galvanize a local community. Like no society can be perfect, no media organization, a subset of a civic society, can be perfect. Like a society, media organizations are also a work-in-progress and needs constant monitoring, feedback, and adaptation to suit evolving situations. The comparison between a media organization and society extends a bit further. Like most progressive societies and communities have guidelines, charters, and constitutions, to help reorient their progress towards their cherished goals, media organizations too should have a set of guideline.

In this capstone, it was my endeavor to set broad guidelines for the operations of a participatory media organization set in a hyper-local community. I believe that for Rashmi to be truly successful in its journey of becoming a civic player, it should handover greater control of the process to the people while constantly guiding the discourse and maintaining minimal, but credible gatekeeping. There is also a need to make the organization more responsive towards people. Rashmi, as a journalistic organization should respect the information received from people, and in the eventuality of rejecting them, the contributors should be informed about the reasons that led to the rejection.

Tinkering the journalistic practices has been a constant theme of this capstone, and I believe it will be a constant process even when the model is operationalized. Each locality will come with its own challenge, and hence the need to tinker with the existing practices and adapt to the new surroundings.

In all their endeavors, one thing that should remain constant among those responsible for Rashmi's operation is their focus towards people, community, and their civic responsibilities. Acknowledging that it is difficult to achieve aspirational levels at all times, it is still important to keep these factors in the focus while navigating different scenarios on-ground.

In the complex play set in a small community between people, government, and media organization, the final aim of this venture is to help evolve a synergy between people and the government, and act as a medium where both the players can interact on an equal footing.

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