

ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЕ СИСТЕМЫ И МЕДИАТЕХНОЛОГИИ

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DIGITAL NEWS CONSUMPTION IN AN AGE OF MOBILE MEDIA: EXPERIENCE OF TWO COUNTRIES

The paper presents a study of media in the Republic of Belarus and People's Republic of Bangladesh with focus on the news consumption in an age of mobile media. Mobile access to the Internet is changing the way people consume information, yet we know little about the effects of this shift on news consumption. The research provides empirical evidence of the effects of mobile media. We argue that attention to news on mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones is not the same as attention to news for those on computers. Using online audience data, we find that over the past year, the mobile news audience has indeed surpassed the desktop news audience in size. Based on interviews with digital journalists in the Republic of Belarus and People's Republic of Bangladesh about their daily work experiences, the paper outlines entry points for understanding what it is like to labor in networks of high-speed information production and circulation. This paper provides reflective analysis of technological forces which are transforming the media industry in two countries in an era, where the pace of change is leaving many familiar concepts outdated.

Key words: digital journalism, mobile news, social media news, UGC, smartphones, MoJo, Belarus, Bangladesh.

Introduction. As mobile phones have become a staple in most consumers' lives, major media companies are investing more resources into creating new ways of reaching news audiences via mobile platforms. Digital news consumption continues to dramatically shift to tablets and smartphones. Mobile access to the Internet is changing the way people consume information, yet we know little about the effects of this shift on news consumption. Our study is motivated by the aforementioned trends, which suggest that mobile devices are overtaking desktop computers as the primary means by which digital news is consumed.

Nearly a third of the global population will have Internet access by 2023. There will be 5.3 billion total Internet users (66 percent of global population) by 2023, up from 3.9 billion (51 percent of global population) in 2018.

The number of mobile subscribers across the world has taken a rocket pace. Over 70 percent of the global population will have mobile connectivity by 2023. The total number of global mobile subscribers will grow from 5.1 billion (66 percent of population) in 2018 to 5.7 billion (71 percent of population) by 2023 [1].

For the Internet user, the smartphone has become the most important channel for obtaining information

today – this is unconditionally the main gadget of our time. The share of desktops and laptops in the structure of media consumption is rapidly decreasing. In October 2016, the global number of users who access the Internet from smartphones and tablets for the first time exceeded the number of those who use desktops and laptops for this. The digital world experienced an impressive development in 2017–2018. The latest data suggest that more than 90% of Internet users in some countries of the world go online through mobile devices.

As both news and audiences are increasingly mobile, this introduction calls for intensified research into mobility as a core characteristic of journalism. Today, “mobile news” is taken to mean news delivered on a personal and portable interactive device such as a smartphone. Such mobile devices are taken for granted as part of everyday life for many if not most, which has led to news publishers focusing on mobile technologies as a means to connect their audiences with their content [2, p. 3].

The move from print to website was long foretold; news's move onto social media accessed via smartphones was less expected and has resulted in publishers struggling to maintain control over the distribution of their content. Google and Facebook

have developed powerful positions as digital intermediaries channelling traffic, content and data, etc.

The smartphone embodies many of the changes facing journalism, placing mobility alongside uncertainty, innovation, increased competition, greater connectivity, and disruptive change. A journalist using portable electronic devices like smartphones or tablets to gather, edit and distribute text & multimedia content is known as a mobile journalist. The mobile journalists are known by the abbreviation “MoJo”. MoJo means that you can practice broadcast journalism with a mobile, and only with a smartphone [3]. Term “mobile journalism” means to use smartphones in collecting, editing, broadcasting and publishing the news story. As technology evolves every single day, mobile reporting is getting more rooted in newsrooms.

Within the broader realm of digital journalism created, distributed and accessed on smartphones, we find news produced by mobile journalists, and the everyday newsgathering, interacting with sources, recording interviews, taking photographs and videos, and now corresponding with readers through social media [4, p. 151].

As news consumption shifts from desktop to mobile devices, many journalism researchers and stakeholders wonder how this transition will impact news audience behavior. People more often than ever before get their “daily fix” of news on their smartphones, be it through a mobile browser, a social media app or a dedicated news app [5, p. 196].

So far, research has tried to understand how mobile access to news changes media exposure patterns in citizens’ everyday lives. Research so far has found that people attend news differently on mobile devices, i.e. spend less time with it, show higher cognitive effort, and scroll more quickly through it [6, p. 107]. The deficits of attention for smartphones may be most critical because they apply to more people and to groups most likely to be mobile dependent.

Thus, mobile journalism can be defined as a form of storytelling in new media through the usage of a mobile device with access to the internet. The smartphone is the tool used to garner required information, then edit it and distribute this as news from within the community. Mobile journalism has become quite the sensation in the last few years. However, you do not need to bother with gear or have very expensive smartphones to create good content. You need to concentrate on your storytelling to execute a good story.

Main part. The Internet and mobile digital devices have really conquered the world and dominate the media consumption of the population. One of previous studies showed that among students social network sites and the Internet resources have replaced TV as a primary mass source of obtaining

political information [7, p. 107]. The young adults’ news consumption patterns and preferences, as well as media usage, all play a role in the adoption of mobile news [8, p. 124]. The activities of modern journalists under the influence of technology are changing significantly, this is due to the need to be able to work on different platforms (newspaper, website, social networks, instant messengers, etc.).

Modern media in the Republic of Belarus and People’s Republic of Bangladesh are now at the stage of active transformation. They are faced with the task of choosing a development strategy in the digital environment. Most editions have materials that are posted only on the site and in social networks. The main challenge for the industry is the need to quickly adapt traditional media to the new needs of the audience and advertisers.

The mobility paradigm can guide journalism research in examining not only what is changing in news production and consumption, but also in how these changes should be examined. When creating journalistic content in a mobile environment, the following features should be considered. Material in general should not be bulky. Less will be the volume of text is better. The quality headline is important. In mobile journalism, photography is very important. The material must be given a clear structure. Practice shows that modern media consumption is characterized by multi-screen and continuity. Accuracy is a long-held virtue but given the increased need for speed in a 24/7 digital news stream, it may find itself in second place as stories are posted and updated with fresh (and more accurate) information.

The process of examination rather than its end product is the logical outcome of a mobility paradigm study of journalism in motion. This drives real-world questions: what impact has this had on how reporters source newsmakers and stories, how they report on them, and how they construct news packages? What role do mobile devices have in different forms of journalism, and how is news for mobile devices brought alive and consumed in the form of text, audio and video?

Republic of Belarus. Internet penetration in the Republic of Belarus in January 2020 amounted to 79% of the adult population (7.49 million). The network’s audience grows mainly with older people, since among young people and middle-aged people, Internet penetration is close to the limit.

11.93 million mobile subscribers are accounted for 9.45 million residents of the Belarus – this is approximately 126% of the population. Thus, the number of mobile subscribers exceeds the population. The number of active users of social networks is 3.9 million people (41%) of the population. Such figures are given in the report on global Internet trends, prepared by Hootsuite and We Are Social [9].

Belarusian media choose various strategies for presence in the mobile environment. The most successful online media distribute content across multiple platforms. An example is the Belarusian portal Onliner.by, whose audience is about 650 thousand unique visitors per day. In August 2016, Onliner.by introduced a responsive design. New technological solutions were introduced, in particular, multimedia texts with elements of longread. They are based on a rich visual range. All materials use alternating text and photos. Each time you scroll on the smartphone screen, a photo appears after the text. Short capacious paragraphs of not more than 5–7 lines are used. All these creative tricks are designed to make content consumption as simple as possible from the screen of a smartphone.

The mechanisms for broadcasting journalistic content have also undergone changes. Each publication on Onliner.by is considered in two planes. The traditional “literary” heading is given to users of conventional computers. A short and capacious is given for users of mobile devices. An example of a title for a desktop is “A 20-year-old girl from Rechitsa won \$ 15 thousand by signing up for a model on Instagram”, for a mobile – “Belarusian won \$ 15 thousand on Instagram”. In February 2020, Onliner.by also began posting Stories format announcements for smartphone users (Fig. 1).

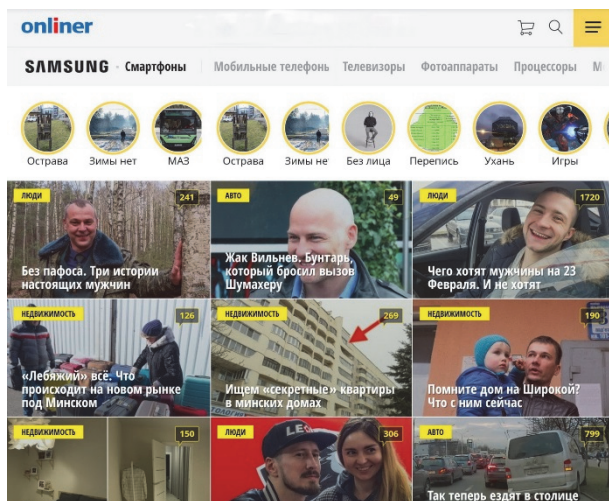


Fig. 1. The main page of the site Onliner.by

Onliner.by editor-in-chief Nikolai Kozlovich noted in an expert interview that in the near future the most popular strategy would be “mobile only”. “Today it is important to produce and repack quality content for any format and platform, no matter how many appear. And they will arise, changing our ideas about the profession with increasing speed. And this is an extremely fascinating story! In 2019, a parallel universe of Telegram channels was formed in Belarus. They did not kill (and will not kill) the profession, they

won’t take our reader from us. It’s just that the media infrastructure has become more complex with another important element. And traditional media have to admit it. And speed up. It is not easy, but it is a challenge. We have entered the era of media turbulence, which means the only hope is to work for the target audience that you didn’t get from Google, but comes to you every day on the main page of the site or immediately into the content sections. Knowing this audience is the foundation of our success”, said Nikolai Kozlovich.

In 2019, the author of this study conducted 85 semi-structured interviews with media managers from the regional media of the Republic of Belarus on factors that influence the development of local newspapers. The subject of the interview was such thematic fields as the impact of digital technology on the work of journalists; content and its distribution; features of the audience and its media consumption; work with communities in social networks; the dynamics of business models.

“Over the past 7 years, our site’s traffic has grown from 50 to 1.200 unique visitors per day. Although we have a small area, 19.000 inhabitants. All editorial journalists work on the site. If any event takes place we immediately post a photo and video report on the site, write a text that is constantly updated. Readers know that we work efficiently. Such materials receive many positive reviews in social networks, more than a thousand views on the site”, said editor-in-chief of the Korelich regional newspaper “Polymia” Inna Leyko.

“We regard the site not as an addition to the newspaper, but as an independent platform. We were afraid that the circulation would collapse. That did not happen. The audiences are different. The site is maintained by an individual, an editor of an online resource. He is engaged in social networks. The materials are first published on the website of the publication, and then in the newspaper”, said editor-in-chief of the Braslav regional newspaper “Braslavskaya Zvezda” Vyacheslav Kolodinsky.

Interviews showed that in order to work successfully in the digital environment, many Belarusian media outlets had to restructure their structure, modernize website designs, change the planning system, organize working hours, and develop a new material incentive system for employees. As our study showed, today many of the mass media of the Republic of Belarus have turned into independent multimedia resources with a significant share of content that is created specifically for sites and social networks.

According to the majority of the chief editors of the Republic of Belarus, the main challenge for the industry is the need to adapt traditional media as quickly as possible to the new needs of the audience

and advertisers. Study participants agree that a number of global trends over the course of one decade have fundamentally changed the role of the print press. The regional media of the Republic of Belarus are striving to meet the challenges of the times, which, so far, allow them to basically retain their audience.

The results of the study confirmed the key trend in modern journalism, which means that journalistic content today is created not for any particular communication channel (newspaper or website), but based on multichannel distribution (social networks, instant messengers, recommendation services, etc.). In conditions of high-speed production and dissemination of information, the nature of creative activity in the editorial office intensified.

People's Republic of Bangladesh. Internet penetration in Bangladesh, a densely populated country in South Asia, in January 2020 amounted to 41% of the adult population (66.44 million).

163 million mobile phone connections are accounted for 163.9 million residents of the Bangladesh – this is approximately 99% of the population. The number of active social media users is 36 million people (22%) [9].

As all mobile companies in the country now offer 4G services, the percentage of smartphone users is expected to increase sharply. This could make Bangladesh a heaven for mobile journalism with news organizations tapping into the new audience by turning it into a trend.

Yousuf Omar, who worked with the Hindustan Times nationwide, is an India-born South African journalist. He is cofounder of “Hashtag Our Stories”. With an in depth interview with author, he explained the understanding of mobile journalism as follows: “In a traditional sense MoJo (Mobile Journalist) is somebody who shoots, edits or produces with a mobile device that can be a DSLR, a GoPro or a cell phone. I don't really care. It could even be any. I mean right now I've got a camera on my face. I press a button and lights starts flashing and I'm recording video of you right now. Some, people may call it selfie journalism”. Omar urged journalists focusing more on storytelling and no matter what device they use.

In Bangladesh, we have just started realizing the essence mobile journalism. Here online journalism has already attained huge popularity. To the best of our knowledge, no large scale of study on mobile journalism has yet been developed in our country. It is crucial to study the “mobile journalism” from the international point of view, and it can offer much experience to Bangladesh to promote the study of mobile journalism [10].

There is no room for doubt that smartphone is the perfect device to capture multimedia content during “breaking news” event. Western experts have already told that, next-generation news room

will be created according to the work-flows of mobile journalism [11–14]. We have seen the continuous tendency for potential growth of the practice of mobile journalism among general citizens in Bangladesh, particularly in the big cities.

Over the last years, citizen journalists in Bangladesh captured images & videos of mass protests of political parties, national festivals, road accidents, building collapse & ferry capsizes. Moreover, Bangladesh is a country with rivers crossing and flowing along the land and remote mountain area blanketing Chittagong Hill Tracts. Unsafe journey by road and lack of infrastructure sometimes create difficulties for journalists to reach the news spot. So, covering a story from spots of this type with smartphones can save both valuable time and money of a journalist.

How does citizen journalism affect news production in Bangladesh? User-generated content (UGC), digital storytelling and consistently available live streaming are fuelling the news with different events from different perspectives. Mobile coverage during the Rana Plaza collapsed in April 2013, Shahbag protest in February 2013 and the passenger ferry capsized in the Padma river in August 2014 demonstrated the importance of learning how to report anytime and from any location with a mobile phone.

In July 2016, a trend was set for the news outlets of Bangladesh. It was the first time that Mobile Journalism workshop has been held for newspaper journalists in Bangladesh. The leading Bangladeshi newspaper “Prothom Alo” has hosted a 3-day workshop on Mobile Journalism from July 26–28 at their head office in Dhaka.

“Prothom Alo” in the process of establishing the largest mobile journalism network in Bangladesh trained 184 journalists around the country to shoot, edit and publish content straight from their smartphones.

In July 2016, when the publisher began to experiment with the new techniques and found that MoJo helped them increase the amount of video coverage they produced while improving the speed at which they report on stories for their online daily audience of seven million readers (Fig. 2).

The author was hired by the news organization to train reporters and has held workshops in Bogra, Khulna, Sylhet, and Chittagong. They are now using mobile journalism to re-shape the news channel, encouraging reporters all over the country to produce audio-visual content for social audiences.

The reporters, who predominantly use the more affordable Android devices, have been posting content to YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as the publisher's main site, which is the most visited newspaper website in Bangladesh.

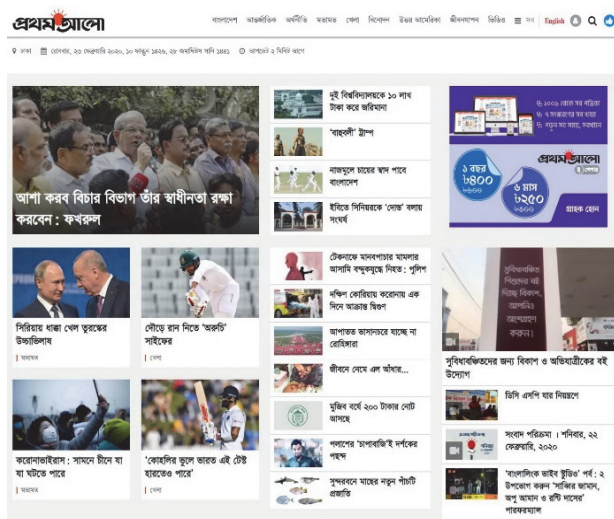


Fig. 2. The main page of the site Prothomalo.com

The publisher is even developing its own mobile journalism handbook, for distribution among all the reporters to refer back to when gathering, producing and publishing news reports. More than 30 smartphones have been provided by “Prothom Alo”, but at the moment, most journalists are using their own devices. The publisher hopes to be able to kit out reporters with more advanced tools soon.

With the comparison of Western news media, Bangladeshi media outlets are not less-developed in the sense of using the modern technologies. The transformation to the latest version of mobile technology is also widely visible in Bangladeshi mass media.

The country's popular print and online newspapers are accessible for the users of Android, iOS and other smartphone devices. More & more news sites are coming into the sight of the mobile Internet users. The mobile operators of Bangladesh offer a very cheap rate for the mobile Internet, which plays a key role in gaining popularity of browsing Internet via mobile phones.

“The evolution of media in mobile is very similar to that of the internet. Initially, it was an extension, the online version of the newspaper or a convenient method to store and publish content or the scripts from a TV program online. Only after a substantial period of time, journalists really began to think about what it can do on its own, and started testing the limits of the internet. I think that is where we are currently with the mobile”, said executive editor of “Prothom Alo” digital Selim Khan.

The Digital is transforming our previously fixed point of view of journalism and methods and tools utilized to tell the most important stories. With different live stream mobile apps, news organizations are all the more committed to publishing live video front and center on all digital platforms. It gives us an effective method to incorporate mobile journalism

into the process of news gathering and provides everyone with the chance to play around with various forms of storytelling. Moreover, many mobile-friendly products are available, a social product and these virtual transport the audience to the place, and this is what people have started expecting from digital journalism.

The news organizations in Bangladesh offer their users the latest breaking news by sending an SMS to a selected mobile number. On November 4, 2015, a new event happened for the online news outlets for Bangladesh. Country's first online newspaper “Bdnews24” with joining forces of top mobile operator Robi formally launched first SMS-based breaking news service in Bangla letters. Now most of the online, print and broadcast new media use SMS service to reach their target audience via mobile device.

Moreover, all the leading news publishers provide breaking news alerts via push notifications through their news app.

Mobile journalism concept is not being practiced enough by all the media houses in Bangladesh. Only the country's reputed media like “Portohom Alo”, “Bdnews24”, “Jamuna TV” and few more online and TV channels have been trying to implement the mobile journalism strategy in their work-flow.

Moreover, in Bangladesh, not all news organization still has a mobile media strategy. To popularize this emerging field of journalism news media should organize industrials training, provide accessories and learning modules for media professionals exactly what is being done by the “Prothom Alo” over the last few years. On the other hand, mobile device could be an ideal solution to cover crisis and emergency stories in Bangladesh and TV media can replace their big cameras to small mobile cameras.

Conclusion. Thus people increasingly receive news on mobile devices, either via dedicated news apps or through browsing news websites or social media on their mobile [15, p. 619]. We argue that attention to news on mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones is not the same as attention to news for those on computers.

The data obtained indicate that the media in the Republic of Belarus and People's Republic of Bangladesh have accumulated sufficient experience in the development of mobile journalism. The results of the study show the acceleration of the pace of the media industry in the direction of social media and mobile news, demonstrate a decrease in the role of desktops as an Internet access channel and a significant increase in the consumption of online video news. In any case, it is obvious that these challenges must be answered by accelerating the digital transformation, presenting journalistic content in new formats.

A limitation of this study is its focus on two countries. Thus, results are not generalizable to other countries without additional analysis. Further research may include deepening internationalization of empirical and theoretical work; mobiles as key to

larger trends and systems in digital media and journalism; reimagining journalism education and media work and professions, to reflect the deep changes at work in mobile news and mobilities of news and digital journalism.

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