Solution journalism: The need of the contemporary developing societies

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Abstract

Solution journalism is a reporting on the responses to the social problems which include evidences and insights to help the communities. This trend of reporting has gained a new height in recent years. The developing societies across the world have been suffering from various forms of social problems which largely affect populations of these countries. Here the role of media is crucial since it not only covers the social problems but also provide essential preventive measures to the society. With the development of innovative technologies, the media has gained huge reach across the world. The urban population is more dependent on media for their informational needs. The paper attempts to identify the need of solution oriented information in the contemporary developing societies like India. A survey (n=500) was conducted in the Delhi/NCR regions of India to find out the dependency of people on media to connect with the news on social problems and their quest to find solutions in the news programmes/ reports. It was found that maximum respondents were highly dependent on media to get access to the information about the social happenings. They were also found to prefer more in-depth information in need of solutions to the widely shared social problems.

Keywords: Solution Journalism Media News developing societies

Introduction

In the present scenario, the world has gained remarkable progress in several fields but the complex wave of social issues like violence, poverty, inequality, unemployment, pollution, health, education and various other multifaceted challenges persists in the several developing countries. These nations are widely experiencing a degradable and unsustainable urban environment which is leading to pseudo-urbanization. The increasing population, degrading climate, declination of fresh water sources, pollution, and increase in land surface temperature has drastic implications on ecology and human morbidity. The government, NGO's and international organization are working on efficient sustainable plans to overcome the challenges. During the COVID pandemic, the increased instabilities and uncertainties led the world to face severe disrupts that resulted into global crises. The Human Development Index (HDI) first time dropped and the agenda of Sustainable Development [1] faced unprecedented challenges. During the phases of global pandemic, the negative news cycle badly dominated the media landscape. The unfavorable social conditions in the developing societies created negative impact on the social lives of the people. Here the role of media was very crucial as it was considered to be widely accessed source of information. In the modern era of convergence, Media can be easily accessed on digital platforms also. Media play an important role in developing countries by revealing development concerns to guide policymakers. In the current situation of conflict and crises, the media is operating in the same traditional business model to gain huge profit from the market. The previous studies revealed that the western media would often focus on negative information [2] which created a regular trend in the developing nations also [3]. During the phase of pandemic, the public diverted and avoided news and they did not trust the media (Newman et al., 2019). People generally avoided watching news to prevent fear, insecurity and other impact of its negative contents [4,5]. They were expecting positive contents with in-depth information from the media outlets with a possibility to find solutions to the problems. In such a scenario, the responsibility of media was more than providing news in the old conventional pattern of reporting [6,7]. in a paper titled 'The Constructive Role of Journalism and

Journalism Practice' predicated on the opportunities and interest of social progress among the mass. They defined the need of solutions journalism which focuses on initiatives that seek to engage communities to solve the broader societal problems across the spectrum of subject matter. News that covers the response to the widely shared social problems are considered to be known as a technique within the practice of constructive journalism [8,9]. in the article titled 'Journalists' perceptions of solutions journalism and its place in the field' mentioned that Solution-oriented reporting pushes journalists to think about the social responsibility of the press and question whether they consider society's best interest in their daily thought processes and habits. Solution Journalism is one form of such a constructive reporting which provides solutions to the social problems. As mentioned by [10] the framing of solution oriented stories include information which examines "howdunnit" instead of traditional approach of "whodunit." It completely focus on 'how' opposed to 'who' to delve deeper into the information and provide solutions along with the 5 W's (who, what, when, where and why) [11]. Therefore, the information providing preventive measures, precautions and solutions in its stories were more accessed/read and watched by the mass. In the present contemporary developing societies, the need of solution journalism is felt on the global level. Several organizations like Solution Journalism Network (SJN), Yes, Reporters d'Espoirs, World changing, the Tyee and Solutions are actively working to promote solution journalism for social upliftment of the society. The idea is to highlight the works of journalists done in communities to inspire people for the positive social changes. Such an approach helps to provide positive ideas to solve social issues. According to SJN, solution journalism can be considered to be a welcome change to fight the norms of negative news. With such an effort of journalists, agencies, media organizations and researchers, solution in the news stories are now easily available in the form of articles, features, documentaries, debates/discussions/interviews, etc.

The aim of the paper is to identify the dependency of people on media to connect with the news on social issues and their pursuit to find solutions in these news programmes/ reports. Hence, with an objective to identify the need of solution oriented news in the developing nations, the paper poses two essential questions:

RQ1 Which media and programme segments are preferred by the people to watch/ read/ listen to the news on social problems?

RQ2 Do they quest to find solutions to the widely shared social problems in their preferred media progammes?

Review of Literature

Development journalism has been redefined as a matter of debate since its inception in 1970's. It was argued that this type of journalism require solution based approaches with follow up stories [12]. Hence solution journalism can be considered as an extension of development journalism. In the year 1998, the Solution Journalism was first used in the Columbian Journal Review with an article highlighting the techniques used by prominent newspapers which included solutions to the widely shared social problems [13-15]. defined the Solution Journalism movement initiated by three journalists of the West, David Bornstein, Tina

Rosenberg, and Courtney Martin, who also founded the Non-profit organization Solution Journalism Network (SJN) in the year 2013 with an aim to connect and educate journalists across the world about rigorous reporting covering response to the social problems [16-18] defined that the Solutions journalism has a growing appeal in the professional world of media since it has the potential to address what's being done to solve a problem rather than reporting solely on the problem itself [19]. in an organized study mentioned the reaction of respondents who were asked to read the solution-oriented stories. They had more perceived knowledge about the topic and greater intentions to act in support of the cause since the story motivated them compared to those who read conflict-oriented versions of the stories [20]. in an article 'The rise of solutions journalism' mentioned that the curative narrative inspires coverage of the recovery and re-establishment process even long after the large-impact tragedies. In a study [21,22]. examined the part of news stories that included treatment, prevention, criminal justice, pharmaceutical manufacturer, opioid prescribing, and other solutions found that several evidence-based solutions in the news received very little coverage [23]. in 'Visual Solutions Journalism: A Theoretical Framework' defined solution journalism as difficult and fact-driven stories that include responses to social problems and has gained high momentum. In another study it was mentioned that Solutions journalism has the potential to effectively engage communities in journalistic production [24]. In a study conducted by [25], it was mentioned that the importance of solution journalism has been revealed through the efforts of academics and practitioners worldwide. Scholars and news media professionals describe solution journalism as an approach that "arguments the right, hoping that someone can emulate it [26]. in a recent study states that as of 2021 reports, the solutions journalism was found to be practiced in several newsrooms including the BBC, Politico, The New York Times and Fast Company which can be accessed through their news site. Also, an opinion column was published by The New York Times since 2010 titled "Fixes." which is described on the NYT website as: "Fixes looks at solutions to social problems and why they work." In the weekly newsletter published by 'The Washington Post', it also had a column titled "The Optimist" that shares positive news from around the world. A section of the Fast company named "Impact," described on its website as "the big ideas that are changing the world." In the article, [27] further discussed the writing style of journalists on the social problems which tends to worry the "other institutions, like government, about the solutions of the social prolems.

Methods

To meet the objectives of the research, the present study used the survey method which included structured questionnaires as the main tool for collecting primary data. With the help of previous literature, the tools were constructed carefully to collect relevant information for the study which included both open and close ended questions. The three sections of the survey included demographic profile of the respondents, media programme segments preferred by the respondents for the news on social problems and the respondents pursuit to find solutions to the problems in the coverage provided by the media on the issues of widely shared social problems. Through a purposive sampling,

a total 500 respondents were selected from the locations of Delhi/NCR regions of India. This included the locations of Delhi, Gurugram, Ghaziabad, Greater Noida and Noida. The respondents were divided on the basis of age, gender and their education qualification. The respondents residing outside Delhi/NCR were not a part of this study. The data was further analyzed using **Table 1, Table 2, Graph 1** and **Graph 2**.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the Respondents.

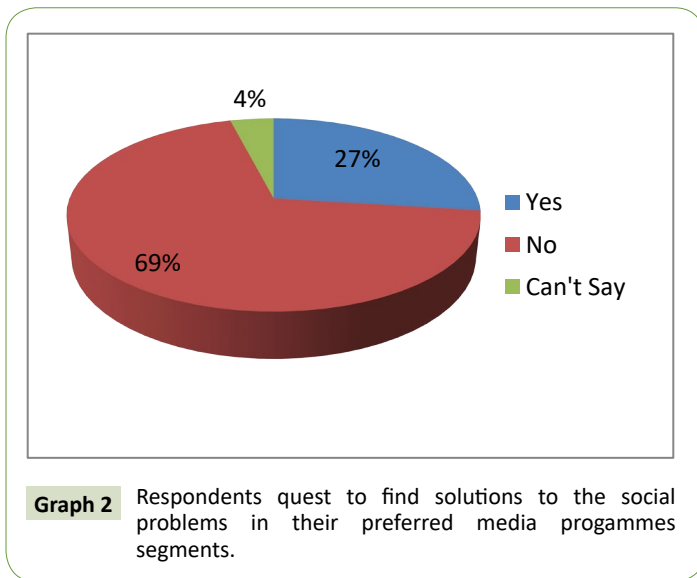| Age distribution of the respondents	
18 to 25 years	14%
26 to 35 years	30%
36 to 50 years	49%
Above 50 years	7%
Gender distribution of the respondents	
Male	59%
Female	41%
Others	0%
Highest qualification of the respondents	
Secondary	0%
Higher Secondary	0%
Graduates	26%
Maters	43%
PhD and above	31%

Findings

In the modern era of globalization, the media is not just limited to newspapers, news channels and radio. The social media is widely accessed on the global level and the digital technologies are commonly used in the developing societies like India. The previous studies revealed that the media literacy rate is high in various developing countries across the world. According to India. in the digital literacy in the urban areas increased to 61% and in the rural India it increased to 25%. Hence the present study included all the media platforms which are easily accessible in the developing nations. As per the report of statista.com the internet consumption is highest in India in comparison to other media platforms, but the study revealed that this has not altered the habit of television viewing of several media consumers in the urban India. Therefore, the survey was conducted in the Delhi and the National capital regions of India which included 500 respondents from five different locations. They were all above 18 years of age. The **Table 1** represents the details of the demographic profile of the respondents. 72 (14%) respondents were in between 18 to 25 years of age group, 150 (30%) respondents were between 26 to 35 years of age group, 245 (49%) respondents were in between 36 to 50 years of age group and 33 (7%) respondents above 50 years of age group. 295(59%) respondents were male and 205

Table 2: Tabular representation of the scale of total responses received from the respondents on their preferred media and the programme segments for the news on social problems.

Segment of the programmes	Social Media	News Channels	News Papers	Radio	Podcast	Other digital media	Total
Health	31	37	13	2	4	20	107
Education	29	4	5	1	6	14	59
Agriculture	9	17	9	0	2	3	40
Environment	14	42	31	0	0	17	104
Science, technology & innovations	4	2	5	0	0	15	26
Rural development	14	20	2	1	0	14	51
Social crimes & Moral Problems	24	25	12	1	0	4	66
International Human Rights	4	2	1	2	0	3	12
Religious	1	2	0	1	27	4	35
Total	130	151	78	8	39	94	500
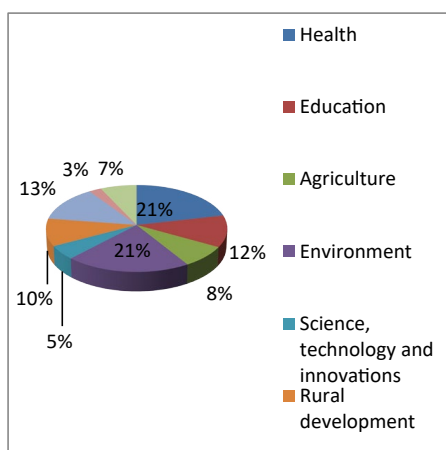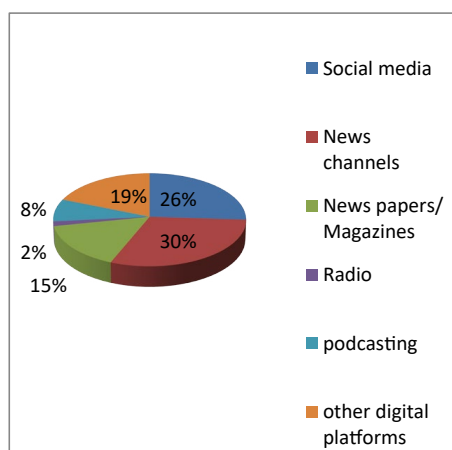
Graph 1 The media and programme segments preferred by the respondents to watch/ read/ listen to the news on social problems.

Graph 2 Respondents quest to find solutions to the social problems in their preferred media progammes segments.

(41%) respondents were female. 130 (26%) respondents were graduates in different streams, 213 (43%) respondents completed their masters and 157 (31%) respondents were PhD holders in different subjects.

The media and the programme segments preferred by the respondents to watch/ read/ listen to the news on social problems

The India media landscape consists of several Newspapers, magazines, television news channels and radio stations. The reports of statista.in detail the vast increase in digital literacy among the urban and rural Indians. Hence the Indian mass can easily access all kinds of media platforms. However, the coverage of the media and the interests of the respondents alter their preferences to read/ watch/ listen to their preferred media. Maximum 30% respondents were regular viewers of News Channel programmes. They preferred watching the News channels for all kind of news requirements. 26% respondents preferred Social media platforms and 19% preferred other digital platforms for their news requirements since it was easily available on mobile devices and could be accessed anytime. 15% respondents preferred to read Newspapers and magazines for their News requirements, 8% showed interest in Podcast but preferred it more for story telling on social issues. Very few 2% respondents were interested in radio channels for any kind of news requirements. They prefer radio more for song and entertainment purposes. Thus the media preferences of the respondents were limited to their interest in the news. Some of the respondents preferred to use media just for their entertainment needs, hence they had mixed opinion on this question. However, maximum respondents were serious about the social problems of the developing countries. They were regular media users and expected the media to provide in-depth information on the widely shared social problems. In the contemporary developing nations like India, the media prefers to highlight the problems of the society in a very comprehensive manner. The respondents had a mixed view on the coverage of media on social problems. Maximum respondents preferred to read and watch contents which provided them in-depth

information about the health problems and environmental issues with preventive measures and solutions. 21% respondents were interested in finding solutions to the health problems in the News channel programmes, Newspaper reports, Social Media platforms, and on other digital platforms. The global pandemic was a big reason for health awareness among the mass in the developing nations. There were serious about the news on seasonal diseases and preventions, hospital conditions, medial developments in the state, innovative measures of the government and health departments and the position of the nation in the health and happiness index. 21% respondents were interested in the news with solutions on environmental issues like air pollution, water pollution, weather conditions, storms, thunders, government measures to improve water condition, latest reports on climate changes and other unfavorable weather conditions. 13% respondents prefer to find solutions to the incidents of social crimes and moral issues like government action against criminals, the GDP growth of the nation, government policies to decrease poverty and population in the state, the issues of unemployment and the implementation of New education policies (NEP) in the school, colleges, farmers protests, the latest developments on Citizen Amendment Acts, etc. Since maximum respondents were the residents of urban and semi urban societies, they were not much interested in the news of rural development (10%) and agriculture (8%). They find such information only on limited media platforms. The Krishi Darshan programme of Doordarshan was watched by 4% respondents who were connected to agricultural occupations. Some respondents also preferred to read such information in magazines or surf on the social media platforms. The respondents between 18 to 25 years of age group preferred to find solutions to their educational requirements through social media, news channels and Newspapers/ magazines or other digital platforms. They preferred the watch the News channels or read the newspaper to collect latest information on the University admissions, government jobs, New education Policy (NEP) and the latest developments by the government. They were few respondents who were also interested to find solutions in the news of science / technology and innovations (5%) or in the issues of international human rights (3%). The religious contents were found to be popular among the listeners of Indian Podcast programmes. Maximum respondents interested in religious contents (7%) were the regular Podcast listeners from the Delhi/ NCR regions of India. They showed interest in finding solutions in the religious contents like horoscope, hidden mysteries of the Himalaya, spiritual mysteries of the countries, Palmistry and the Reiki science. The tabular representation of the responses provides detail views on the coverage of media on the social problems.

Respondents quest to find solutions to the social problems in their preferred media and programmes segments?

The respondents agree to the fact that the Social problems are covered by the media on a larger scale in the developing countries. The challenges of health, environment and social crimes are covered by the media in a comprehensive manner. A total 135 respondents (27%) could find in-depth stories in the newspapers,

magazines, news channels and social media platforms. In fact most of the respondents use social media platforms in need of solutions to their problems. However they were not confident about the reliability of the news on social media and other digital platforms. Most of them find the contents fake or misleading on such media platforms. Some were also aware about the disinformation and misinformation on social media platforms. Few respondents also considered podcast as an excellent medium to provide in-depth information on religious and social contents. The regular television viewers disagree to the fact that the media provide solution oriented stories in their coverage. Although the news channels coverage include maximum hard news stories on social issues but their debates and discussions often ends with political arguments. The newspaper and magazine readers had a mixed view on this question. The regular magazine readers could remember several stories covered in detail with proper solution on various social problems. The issues of climate change, food security, health, diseases, social crimes, education, drugs and government policies were mentioned by some of the respondents. But 345 respondents (69%) disagree to the fact that the media provide solution oriented news stories through any of its medium. According to these respondents, the media merely covers the stories in detail but they could not remember any such stories which also covered the solutions to the social problems. Even during the global COVID-19 pandemic, they prefer not to access any media platform to avoid the fear of negative news. Most of the respondents preferred to access media just for their regular informational and entertainment needs but not for any solution. They specifically criticized the social media platforms for providing negative news on social problems instead of any positive solutions to those problems. They find development journalism missing on several media platforms. However there were 4% respondents who were unable to answer this question. They were confused with the contents of media. Although the media provide vast coverage to the news on crime, forgery, politics, strikes, demonstrations and accidents but they could not remember if the news provided solution in any form to the widely shared social issues.

Therefore maximum respondents considered media as the medium which provide information about all kind of social problems with detail coverage on several issues but still lack reporting on the solutions to the social problems. According to them almost all the national news channels and newspapers carries similar kind of contents which are mostly hard news based on popular incidents of the society. The patterns of contents are mostly conventional and there were no additional information that particularly focus on the innovative ways to provide contents with solutions. The mixed views of the respondents showed lack of satisfaction with the contents of social and digital media platforms since they considered the contents unreliable unless it is published by authentic sources.

Discussion and Conclusion

Over all the findings suggest that although the media covers several essential stories of crime, politics, education, accidents, sports, entertainment, business, health, art and culture but the coverage of solutions to the widely shared social problems are yet not a part of the mainstream media. Maximum respondents preferred media for their informational and entertainment need. They could not completely prefer media outlets to find solutions to the social problems. Therefore, in the developing nation, the role of media is a topic of huge debate since it is not just limited to be a source of information but also a medium to promote social development. In previous studies it was found that Solution Journalism has the power to directly address the root cause of any problem since it provides a detail view to the society. But this role of media is lacking in the developing nations like India. The coverage of developmental issues are limited to social events and activities which rarely covers the response to the social problems. In various parts of the world, solution journalism has modified the trend of reporting on social issues which is a promising development in the world of journalism. This trend not just provides solutions but engage the target audience through its follow up stories on the issues which itself becomes a cause of change and development. It is a new narrative format to provide new routes to principal issues in our society. Thus, Solution journalism is an essential need of the developing nation which has the potential to inspire, motivate and involve the viewers/readers/listeners to make a positive impact on the society. This essential skill of reporting should be promoted by the media platforms by providing their journalists the required resources and trainings. Without doing so the media will have to shoulder the blame for not promoting social justice in the developing nations where the social problems are increasing on a very fast pace.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to the urban and semi-urban respondents residing in the Delhi/NCR regions of India. The respondents were not clearly aware about the term 'Solution Journalism' and their responses were limited to the questions asked on the social problems covered through the review of literature in the previous research works. The local news mediums were not the part of respondent preferences of the news channels, newspapers and magazines. Hence, this study was limited to a very small proportion of the vast population of India.

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