ABSTRACT

This chapter on the consumption of mobile news in developing country draws on the limited but growing scholarship on journalism and mobile media. India, becomes an emblematic instance, as India’s mobile phone subscriber base peaked to more than 1 billion users in late 2015, making India the second largest mobile phone user base. In recent years, mobile media in India have also penetrated individuals’ news consumption and sharing behaviors. These emerging practices can be posited in relation to the ubiquitous presence of mobile devices and a steadily expanding digital ecosystem. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, this chapter seeks to explore how mobile apps position themselves into wider news media assemblages in a developing country like India and what are the factors that influence mobile apps usage for news consumption in India? Hence, broadly, the article aims to explore, how these emerging practices are transforming not only the dominant ways of distributing the news but also the very nature of the relationship between news media and its audience.

INTRODUCTION

The multipurpose mobile phone represents an evolving but inadequately regulated medium for distributing news and information in developing countries like India. Although, there are a number of studies that explore the use of mobile phones for news consumption in other Asian countries, there are hardly any studies that explored the use of mobile apps for news consumption in the Indian context (Chan, 2015; Li, 2013; Wei, R., et al., 2013). In regard to everyday news consumption, news consumers are alternating between several online platforms, and mobile media have gained significant importance as a rich site for studies (PEW, 2010; Chan-Olmsted et al., 2013). Bearing in mind, their extensive ubiquity, mobile news media allow audiences to access news content almost anywhere, anytime, and in various formats (Dimmick et al., 2011). In the process, the news content becomes an adaptable commodity that is no longer associated with a particular media format (Hartmann, 2013). Parallel to multiplatform commercial tactics,
news items are constantly modified so that it may reach hitherto non-distributed audiences (Westlund, 2013). While the news audience is witnessing an array of options, they are also expected to continuously navigate within a growing digital media ecosystem. Presently, even in developing countries, emerging practices of accessing news is no longer an inconspicuous preference between legacy news media and new digital media. Rather, the individuals consciously create a blend of different news access points into multifarious arrangements of media use (Yuan, 2011). Thus the conflicting relation between legacy media and new media is increasingly getting blurred, both in terms of the use of technology (choice between newspaper and mobile news apps) and preference of content (established news media house vs. alternative/independent news media), as these emerging practices and usage patterns become more commonplace. News audiences in different countries are thus making their way through the assortment of news messages across print, broadcasting, web, and mobile media platforms (Schroder, 2014). This study seeks to invest in the understanding of the emerging practices and patterns of consuming mobile news in developing nation-states.

In recent years, mobile media in India have also penetrated individuals’ news consumption and sharing behaviors. These emerging practices can be posited in relation to the ubiquitous presence of mobile devices and a steadily expanding digital ecosystem that have produced a set of conditions in which users rapidly acquire a set of behaviors connected to the medium, effectually incorporating mobile apps within the digital media ecosystem of news media consumption. Within this context, this chapter aims to explore mobile news media consumption practices in India in response to two essential questions: firstly, how mobile apps position themselves into wider news media ecosystem in a developing country? and second: what are the factors that influence mobile apps usage for news consumption in India? The following section briefly outlines the patterns of mobile news consumption with reference to existing literature; the second section describes the Indian scenario in relation to rapidly expanding mobile phone culture and a thriving app ecosystem in India; the third section elucidates the method employed for this study and the following sections comprise of detailed discussion of the main findings; limitations and future scope of research is discussed in the concluding section.

MOBILE NEWS AND THE EXPANDING NEWS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Even though the personal computer or laptop continues to be the primary digital device for accessing news, but the most important recent development is the increasing access through multiple devices (Schröder & Christian, 2010). Hence, the question (RQ1) remains, how mobile apps locate themselves into the broader spectrum of news media ecosystem in a developing country? Besides the general understanding of mobile news consumption it is crucial to question (RQ2) what are the factors that impact the usage of mobile news apps for news consumption? This is particularly pertinent considering ubiquitous attributes of the mobile phone, contesting conventional news audience research.

The practice of reading news through mobile phones have greatly influenced the ways audience usually access news in traditional media (Peters, 2012). Presently, in different national contexts, a number of news media are competing with each other for audience’s attention. This condition may remind of niche theory, which argues every medium need to offer specific prospects of gratification so that it may sustain its niche position (Dimmick et al, 2011). In other words, if a particular medium has to survive in this highly competitive market it has to provide distinctive benefits. Thus, for every audience member, media have to strive to cohabit and in the process an ecosystem of media access points evolve (Feaster, 2009).