

# Changing Roles of Gatekeepers in the Era of New Media: A Study of Gatekeeping on Instagram

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**Abstract:** *Social Media, being the part of New Media is the emerging and vitally used platform for sharing and consuming information. Because of its massive reach and accessibility, the number of users on Social Media is increasing rapidly. Social Media platforms are free and allow every user to share the content freely. With the increasing Smart phone users, now users from anywhere can capture the images and videos and share the same on Social Media. Any information once uploaded online spreads widely making it difficult to stop its spread and even to monitor it. Users freely share their opinion and the content supporting their ideology and philosophy. The New Media platforms encourage users generated information and citizen journalism as users also share the newsworthy information. There is an absence of Gatekeepers on the Social Media which leads to sharing unedited content on these platforms. Being unaware of the Media Ethics users also share fake News, misinformation, disinformation, sensitive and malign content. This conceptual paper studies the importance of Gatekeepers for the Social Media platform. It examines the impact of unedited newsworthy information shared by user and drives to the conclusion and discussion.*

**Keywords:** Instagram, Gatekeeping, Social Media, New Media, Prosumers

## 1. Introduction

Media in particular has come to a catch 22 situation all over the world. Especially, it has variants with relation to the developed and developing world. The social media and its stimulating platforms are brimming with fresh air every month and the grappling effect is in place. New Media is surely changing the phase of the world. It has an impact on all the fields of the world and thusly it has also brought a massive change in the field of Mass Communication. As much as the definition of New Media remains complex the role of New Media is also critical.

Media, be it traditional or New, serves the masses by communicating the information to them. The presence and users on the New Media platforms are increasing rapidly; the masses are consuming majority of the information from the New Media platforms. Audiences of conventional platforms are shifting to New Media and thus the conventional Media is also finding the ways of coexistence with the New Media.

With the presence of masses on online platforms the traditional media is also experimenting on New Media to serve the Masses. The traditional Media organizations are establishing their presence on the New Media platforms. The well - established News Media organizations are now competing with the emerging independent News Media Websites and Web portals. New Media have successfully changed the definition of Mass Communication. Prior to internet Era Mass Communication had the geographic boundaries, where the reach of medium would define the strength of Mass Communication. But the New Media has eradicated the existence of such barriers. The definition of consumers has changed from regional, national, international to global along with the type of News Media Organization. Instagram deals with huge content daily which is shared from heterogeneous user to heterogeneous receiver. The content is

shared and received by around 500million users daily and thus Instagram has high potential to influence the audience at large.

Gate keeping is important part of Mass Communication while dealing with massive content how is gate keeping performed on the Social Media platform, Instagram? This research tries to study the distinct characteristics of New Media and Instagram. It examines the Gate keeping as an important process in conventional media and New Media platform, Instagram. It also observes the posts shared by Instagram users and their handling of content. The research paper also tries to answer other research questions and derive conclusion.

**Instagram, commonly abbreviated to IG or Insta** is one such prevailing Social Media platform which connects with large number of audiences globally. The photo and video sharing social networking service allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organized by hashtags and geographical tagging.

Originally launched for iOS in October 2010, Instagram rapidly gained popularity, with one million registered users in two months, 10 million in a year, and 1 billion as of June 2018. According to recent stats over 1billion users, uses Instagram every month.

The platform has 500 million active users daily. Over 293 million of global Instagram audiences are aged between 18 and 24 years and 338 million aged between 25 and 34 years. Among the number of users 72% of teens use Instagram. More than 50 billion photos have been uploaded on the platform so far. And around 995 photos are uploaded on Instagram every second. With such a huge user base Instagram becomes one of the widely used Social Media platform i then the world. Instagram supports visual content

along with graphics, animation, infographics and text. Instagram is used for a variety of purpose. Because of such wide reach the platform also attracts business and promotions. Various types of influential content are shared on the platform. Around 995 photos are uploaded on Instagram every second, some deals with News rest with information from various other fields.

## 2. Research Methodology

This qualitative, conceptual research paper aims to fulfil the following objectives and attempts to answers the research questions by studying Instagram posts and audience behaviour. The secondary data was collected through the published research papers and books.

### Objectives:

- To verify the user generated news information shared on Instagram.
- To examine Gate keeping in conventional and new platform, Instagram.
- To study the effect of Gate keeping on Instagram.

### Research questions:

- What is the Significance of Gate keeping on Instagram?
- How is the process of Gate keeping changing from traditional to New Media platform, Instagram?
- How is crowd sourced Newsworthy information handled on Instagram?
- What is the effect of unedited News content shared on Instagram?

## 3. Findings and Discussions

### Future of Features of New Media:

Why are researchers all over the globe perplexed with the notion as to how one can contextualize and confront the speed of new media platforms? What would happen to the ever-expanding features unassuming? These and many such challenges are up in for a serious researcher and academia in general. With an emergence of every new platform of Mass Communication the debate of the existence of existing platforms gets significant (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018). But not a major difference was seen with traditional platforms, neither Print Media became obsolete after the invention of Radio nor Radio became obsolete after the emergence of Television. One of the reasons for their coexistence is because of their significant features, while Print Media purely dealt with Print, Radio with audio and Television with Audio - visuals. These features didn't overlap and thus their audience remained well defined in their respective arena.

But after the invention of Internet a greater modification is seen in the field of Mass Communication. It is not just the massive reach and accessibility of New Media that caused threat to the existence of conventional Media, but it was also the features of New Media (Bruns, 2011). New Media is compatible with text, audio, visuals, audio - visuals and has a bundle of additional features. These features caused greater challenge to the conventional platforms.

Even while studying New Media, defining New Media

remains a complex task. Being unaware about the future of the features of New Media defining New Media would be unjustifiable. What does New Media deal with? Internet, Website, Web - portals, Mobile Applications, Desktop Applications, Web pages, social media, Instant - Messaging, Online - streaming. But is that all? Can we really stop and predict that New Media can be nothing beyond this? New Media is modifying and updating every single day or rather every single second. So, like the name of New Media the definition of New Media is also left open for change, modification, up gradation, or update.

We can only study the Newness of New Media, but it is difficult to predict the future of features of New Media. Features will decide the future but, they will equally confuse and leave a trail of unfinished agenda too.

### Future of Conventional Media in the era of Web 2.0:

We cannot undermine the presence of internet and its variants. After all they are conjoint of each other and have a residual effect for smooth operations in different itineraries. Web 2.0 is another notable up gradation of Internet, the giant web of information. Web 2.0 is the second - generation World Wide Web, the web which carries humongous information. Characteristic of Web 2.0 varies majorly from its earlier version. The second generation allows collective and collaborative content. This feature has changed the use of internet. The information on the Internet which earlier could be updated only by the owners of the Websites is now open for the contribution and collaboration from all the users. Thus, the information on the internet has also become vast and humongous.

The Newness of New Media can be studied from various perspectives. One of the distinct characteristics of New Media, which is different from the conventional platform is the Participation. The conventional platforms are Print, Radio or Television rarely encouraged audience participation. The consumers of such media have always remained passive where they could barely get an opportunity to share their information, feedback, or comment. For creating the giant web of information, Web 2.0 has welcomed to collaborate the information. This feature of internet has become another reason for greater participation and presence on the New Media platforms and on Instagram. Instagram initiates active participation, under common circumstances it provides equal opportunities to every user to share their information, feedback, comment or collaborate.

On Web 2.0 a "User" is not merely a consumer of information, but he is also the "Producer" of information. Every User on the New Media platform is a Producer. One User equals to one Producer on the Instagram. Thus, we call the consumer of Instagram are called as "Prosumer" the Producers and Consumer of information.

### News in the hands of Prosumer:

News as defined is a new information of importance which is distinct and unusual. A Journalist or Reporter reports such information and shares the same with masses. While reporting the unusual happening a reporter clearly describes the 5Ws

and 1H (What, Where, When, Who, Why and How). So, who qualifies for sharing such important Newsworthy information which is distinct and unusual? Only a professional journalist working in recognized Media Organization? But what if such information is shared on the platform of Mass Communication by a non - journalist, will the information still qualify as News?

The sharer does not make information "News" but the elements in the information make it "The News". So, distinct important newsworthy information cannot be disqualified as the News on the grounds of sharer of the information. The masses always have such information qualifying to be News. With traditional media a non - journalist can't directly share the information to the masses because of the inaccessibility of the platform. So, such non - journalist becomes a source, witness, or whistle - blower of the information for the traditional Journalist. With the New Media, the consumer of information has also become the producer of information (Singer, J.2014). And with the availability of a free platform a user directly shares such Newsworthy information for the consumption of masses.

New Media have of course led to the emergence of Online Journalism, but Citizen Journalism and crowd sourcing are also bringing notable changes in the field of Journalism and Mass Communication. The New Media platforms have maximum reach and accessibility along with massive audience. Social Media platforms are also being used vitally for sharing the information. Smart phone is another significant key invention in the field of Communication.

The number of Smart phone users is also increasing rapidly. Now masses have even quicker and handheld access to any content available on internet. With a Smart phone in hands anyone can quickly share any content across the platform. This is rapidly increasing the culture of citizen journalism and crowd sourcing.

Online platforms demand constant information. The News Organization serving the News on Online platforms cannot generate massive content just with the help of their reporters. Online Media Organizations also have to rely on other sources for information. A Media organization cannot have their correspondents present at all parts of the region at all the times. So, when a video of news incident is shared on the Social Media platform by a random user present at the site is also considered worthy and consumed by the users. Visual elements are shared massively on Instagram. With smart phones in hand everyone clicks the pictures and videos of such unusual happening or incident and share on this free platform. The users also share their opinions and feedbacks on such user generated news content. The onus the technology passed on the user is huge, gigantic and turns out to be sensitive in real application. That has thrown perpetual challenge. Difficult to manage and consume at the same time but seems democratic to many while discriminatory to many as well.

#### Significance of Gatekeeper:

Well, while we debate about the content flow, its direction, its thickness, and its relevance in place, one cannot derive a

fruitful meaning at once. It's a difficult maze and getting murkier with every passing day. Gatekeeping is a misnomer to many findings of research studies. Gatekeeping is "the process of selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling and repeating information to become news" (Shoemaker et al, 2008) Gatekeeping in general means filtering out the unwanted and irrelevant. In the Editorial department it is the job of Sub - Editor, Editor and even the reporter (Enli, 2007). Newsroom daily receives several News from its various sources like Agency, reports, organizations, etc. The Gatekeepers filters the significant News for the day and elements rest. The traditional media have a limitation of Time and Space and thus Gatekeepers play an important role in sharing only the relevant and verified content with the masses (Tandoc, 2014).

If the information is authentic then even a Instagram user can qualify to be the report of News. Then what is the importance of Gatekeepers? Being experienced in the field the Sub - Editors and Editors has the News sense. They can identify the critical content like sensitive, unverified, or unreliable information and eliminate such information from reaching the masses. Instagram has given power to every user for sharing the information, even the News. They share the information with the motive of getting engagement, attention or becoming viral. But along with it the users also share the information which should not be shared. Videos containing sensitive content are uploaded unfiltered or uncensored on the platform. Instagram consists of audience from various age groups and such sensational content is also shared without warnings. Just by being present on the site and capturing the raw images and videos does not prove the verifiability or relevance of the content to be shared online. The content can disturb the peace and tranquility of the society; it can be hurtful towards a particular community, organisation or individual or contain personal details of accused or victim.

Being unaware about the Ethics a user tends to share such unedited information even without verifying the facts. Such information is received by other Instagram users who are equally qualified in handling the content and they consume and share it further. While dealing with massive audience such disturbing content is enough to disturb the peace of the society leading them to form and share unsolicited opinions.

It has other severe impacts like sharing unsolicited opinions, trolling, abuse and intensifying Social Media trials. There is a presence of massive heterogeneous audience on Instagram. Any content uploaded on Instagram garners varied reaction. Sharing opinion or manipulated information in the name of News is against the Media Ethics. But Media Ethics are not followed by majority of Instagram users due to lack of education and information. After uploading content on online platform, it becomes difficult to stop or monitor its growth and promotion. Sensual content easily gains attention and reaches the wide audience. By the time News Media organization could edit the information the user generated News content already becomes viral in its raw and unedited format on Instagram. So, the content can only be handled before it is uploaded on the Instagram and thus gate keeping before sharing the content is important and needed. The absence of gatekeepers leads to overload of irrelevant content, misinformation, disinformation and even the fake News (Chin

- Fook and Simmonds, 2011) and why not this will take place and will expand manifold because of the characteristics of this platform. I don't find any tool to restrict the flow of information, maybe it's the ethical perspective that may play a constructive role per say.

The two examples of unedited viral content on Instagram:

- 1) The News of Bollywood actor Shushant Singh Rajput's suicide in June 2020 became the trending News for months on Instagram. His pictures from the site also went on trend. The pictures were widely shared unedited and uncensored on Instagram by over million users and received massive engagement. The uncensored images were sensitive and were shared without any warning. The images also lead people form unsolicited opinion on the case and encouraged social media trials.
- 2) Another news from Delhi became viral on Instagram in which 26 - year - old woman was stabbed to death by her husband at a market in Delhi. The video of man stabbing the woman 25 times went viral and was shared widely on Instagram. The sensitive content was again shared without being censored and clearly shows the highly violent visuals which can impact the vulnerable young users on Instagram.

Several such videos and images, sensitive in nature, irrelevant, unverified, manipulated are shared on Instagram every day. Such content is disturbing to younger audience and has complex psychological impact. It also promotes Fake News and misinformation at large which ultimately results in undermining the trust on Media platforms.

#### 4. Conclusion

A general agreement has assumed significant understanding among serious researchers in media studies, which speaks about the ethical and moral perspective in a larger perspective for the functional use. Since Web 2.0 itself promotes the user generated content it will be difficult to stop the users from sharing the information on Instagram. User generated; collaborative content is the soul of Web 2.0. Users on Instagram cannot be restricted in uploading or sharing the information, even if it is newsworthy or sensitive in nature. Over a million of videos and images are shared and consumed daily on Instagram. So, it is difficult to monitor every single content or to have a gatekeeper present for every single user (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018). Thus, educating masses for handling the content, teaching them basic ethics of information has become the need and urgency (Nahon, Karine, 2009). Majority of Instagram users are teenagers. So, education on New Media etiquettes and ethics should be included in high school curriculum. Internet is the present and future, so, New Media studies should not be limited just to the field of Media and Mass Communication, it must be propagated widely. At the end of the day, ethics, morals, and personal justification will only see us all through. No better solution is visible, at least in near future. While promoting 1 User = 1 Producer we should also aim at 1 User = 1 Gatekeeper. This can be a new mantra for arresting the rampant churning of content in an irrational way on Instagram, can we term it as new media consciousness?

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