



Journalist Fellowship Paper

Preparing to pivot Pakistan's shrinking news media to digital

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Attacks on the press	7
Financial pressures	9
Regulation of online media	11
Converging problems	12
Case Study: Rappler, The Philippines	14
What is Rappler?	15
Unwavering journalism through political pressure and censorship	17
Game-changers: Rappler's most innovative digital storytelling practices	18
Case Study: Scroll.in, India	21
What is Scroll.in?	23
Unwavering journalism through political pressure and censorship	24
Game-changers: Scroll.in's most innovative digital storytelling practices	25
Prepping journalists for a digital transition	28
Build your smartphone kit	28
Master all the basics	29
Learn the business	29
Know your audience	30
Keep updating your technical knowledge	30
Train each other	30
Smash your apps	30
A daily dose of social media	31
Showcase your work	31
Up your CV and LinkedIn game	31
Conclusion	33

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Introduction

Bangladesh and Pakistan are the countries furthest behind in the digital revolution, according to a report on emerging digital life in South and Southeast Asia published in 2020 by Deloitte and INCLUSION Fintech Conference. Low social and economic development levels have created a huge gap with other countries when it comes to digital infrastructure and mobility penetration.¹

This has immensely impacted the emergence of digital news media in Pakistan, at a time when our industry is already under immense pressure in other areas – namely freedom of the press, and failing business models.

In a fast-evolving digital age, the fear of being left behind is ever-present throughout the global media ecosystem. But while we've seen legacy media in most countries adopting digital best practices – creating custom-built newsrooms for digital, embracing the mobile-first mantra – we've yet to see that same urgency in my home country of Pakistan.²

Instead, growing digitisation has created new vulnerabilities. The use of this technology has frequently outpaced the construction of institutions, business models, and other systems that could aid in their management.³ Now Pakistan's media faces a three-pronged attack: journalists are arrested or abducted in the course of their work. Financial viability is threatened by a government determined

¹ Deloitte and INCLUSION Fintech Conference, 2020. "*The Next Wave*" *Emerging digital life in South and Southeast Asia*. [online] Available at: <<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/cn/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/deloitte-cn-tmt-inclusion-en-200924.pdf>>

² The New York Times, 2014. *Innovation*. [online] Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.org.au/uploads/52321/ufiles/The_New_York_Times_Innovation_Report_-_March_2014.pdf>

³ "The cyber frontier and digital pitfalls in the Global South" (2021), p. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2017.1408403>.

to weaponise advertising against critical outlets. And new regulations further hamstring media outlets and suppress free speech.

This paper will explain the threats Pakistani journalists face, then look at two outlets – Rappler in the Philippines, and Scroll.in in India – that have faced similar challenges and prevailed. It will look at the innovations they adopted to keep their independence, and will conclude with some suggestions for Pakistani journalists on how to prepare for the storm they are living through.

Attacks on the press

On May 28, 2021, BBC HARDtalk presenter Steven Sackur asked Fawad Chaudhry, Pakistan's current Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, "Day after day, month after month, your government isn't protecting journalists. It isn't protecting freedom of speech. You've been in office for some time, what are you doing about it?"⁴



HARDtalk's Steven Sackur interviewing Fawad Chaudhry, Pakistan's current Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, on 28 May 2021

This interview was conducted a few days after a Pakistani journalist Asad Ali Toor was attacked, bound, tortured, and gagged by three unidentified men at his apartment in Islamabad. According to Toor, one of the attackers said he was an agent of Pakistan Inter-services Intelligence Agency (ISI), although the agency quickly distanced itself from the claim.⁵

Chaudhry sidestepped addressing the mouldering state of freedom of speech, media, and journalists in Pakistan.⁶ He responded to Sackur's question dismissively, saying that it has been "fashionable" in the Western media to accuse ISI whenever these

⁴ BBC World Service - HARDtalk, Fawad Chaudhry: Is Imran Khan reneging on his promises to Pakistan? (2021). Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct1>

⁵ (www.dw.com), D. (2019) Asad Ali Toor: Khan government 'worst for media in Pakistan's history' | DW | 26.05.2021, DW.COM. Available at:

<https://www.dw.com/en/asad-ali-toor-khan-government-worst-for-media-in-pakistans-history/av-57675962>

⁶ BBC World Service - HARDtalk, Fawad Chaudhry: Is Imran Khan reneging on his promises to Pakistan? (2021). Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct1>

incidents happen and that there has been a history of journalists invoking the intelligence agencies for immigration purposes. The implication: the bruises on Toor's body were staged to leave Pakistan and settle in another country.

This is not an isolated event. In the past few years, it has become the norm for Pakistani journalists to receive harassment after publishing or airing a critical story. Many factors contribute to the situation, but no concrete steps have been taken to curb this menace, so much so that Pakistan's rank on the World Press Freedom Index has fallen to 145 out of 180 countries.

Since Imran Khan's election as Prime Minister in July 2018, the influence of the nation's military machinery has expanded dramatically. There have been numerous cases in which the military used its power to impose pressure or censor voices.⁷

On 31 May 2021, one of Pakistan's best known TV presenters, Hamid Mir was banned from his talk show on Geo TV after he spoke against the attack of Asad Ali Toor. "This is the real tragedy of Pakistan today. The country is being run by unknown people. Everyone knows who they are, but no one dares identify them. From the shadows, they evade accountability," Mir wrote in an opinion piece he wrote for the *Guardian*. "The pattern is depressingly predictable. It is always critical and independent-minded journalists who are targeted. The attacks come after a series of threats. After the attack, the victim is accused of faking the incident to seek publicity or political asylum. Despite the evidence, the attackers are never caught. Instead, the victims are called traitors and even made to face new charges."⁸

A month before Toor's incident, senior Pakistani journalist and former chief of the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Absar Alam, was shot while walking near his home in Islamabad. The shooting came after he had been summoned by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for his social media posts criticising the intervention in politics by "the establishment".⁹

⁷ *Pakistan : Under the military establishment's thumb* | *Reporters without borders* (2021). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/Pakistan>

⁸ *Imran Khan promised us press freedom in Pakistan. Now journalists are under attack* | *Hamid Mir* (2021). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/02/imran-khan-press-freedom-pakistan-journalists>

⁹ *Journalist Absar Alam shot, wounded in Pakistan* - *Committee to Protect Journalists* (2021). Available at: <https://cpi.org/2021/04/journalist-absar-alam-shot-wounded-in-pakistan/>

In a similar incident, YouTuber Matiullah Jan went missing for 12 hours in Islamabad and was released 28 miles west of Islamabad in a deserted area. Jan was abducted outside his wife's workplace, a local school, by several men – most of them armed and uniform-clad. He was interrogated and beaten for several hours. Before starting his YouTube channel, Jan had a 24-year career as a journalist before leaving Waqt Television in 2018.

Ten journalists were doxxed after criticising the Imran Khan government and military on BBC Urdu. Similarly, a social media campaign was launched to #BoycottIndyUrdu after a story about the death of four Pakistani officers in a helicopter crash failed to refer to them as “martyrs”.¹⁰

These incidents are disturbing, but more disturbing are the stories of those who go missing and are never heard from again. More than 6,000 individuals remain missing in Balochistan, according to the human rights organisation Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP).¹¹

Despite these examples and evidence of military intervention in the media, there is still considerable support for military forces by the public. Local news organisations do not dare to criticise the establishment openly. This has created a sense of fear and a tendency to self-censorship among Pakistani journalists who fear for themselves and their family's lives. Many have even quit the profession.

Financial pressures

Thousands of jobs in journalism have been lost since July 2018. The ailing economy, along with the loss of government subsidies and diminishing advertising income, caused even large and stable media firms to close their publications and lay off their employees.

The Jang Group, Pakistan's largest media conglomerate, closed down three publications and two bureaus in a single day, laying off almost 1,400 journalists and associated workers. Express Media Group and Dunya Media Group, the third and

¹⁰ *Pakistan: online hate campaigns against BBC and Independent journalists* | Reporters without borders (2021). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/news/pakistan-online-hate-campaigns-against-bbc-and-independent-journalists>

¹¹ *Kidnap, torture, murder: the plight of Pakistan's thousands of disappeared* (2020). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/14/kidnap-torture-the-plight-of-pakistans-thousands-of-disappeared>

fourth-biggest media organisations, fired around 200 journalists and lowered compensation by 15 to 35% for those who remained.¹²

According to Pakistan's federal Information and Broadcast Ministry, there are currently 1,569 print publications, 285 radio channels, over 100 private TV channels, and 43 international channels.

But only a few channels manage to pay salaries on time. Among 34 news channels across the country, 32 channels have failed to clear their employees' dues over two to 11 months. Geo TV now often runs in arrears in payment of salaries to its staff for several months.¹³ More than 7,500 journalists have been laid off from various media channels without notice. This has forced many journalists, even senior journalists with many years of experience, to quit their field.

What went wrong? For a long time, the government was a major advertising sponsor for the media. Since broadcast independence in 2002, the government had been one of the most crucial sources of revenue for Pakistan's commercial media industry. Provincial and federal governments frequently purchased primetime space on major TV networks.

There are two sorts of government advertising: classified and display adverts. Classified advertising is exclusively available in print media and includes vacancy announcements, notices for operations and contracts, and Request for Proposals (RFPs). Display adverts carry government messaging. The latter type of advert costs more than the former.¹⁴ But because their budgets have been pre-approved by the appropriate ministries, media release and payment settlement is relatively uncomplicated.

Pakistan's entire advertising market was worth around Rs 87.7 billion in 2016-17. Government ads accounted for Rs 15.7 billion (almost 18%). The current state decided to drastically reduce media spending (by more than 70%), stepping back even from settling outstanding payments to TV networks and newspapers for

¹² *Who owns the media in Pakistan? Media Ownership Monitor* (2021). Available at: <http://pakistan.mom-rsf.org/en/findings/market/>

¹³ Ali, Ramisha (2020). *Journalist's death: 'I don't know how my brother was running house without pay'*, Independent Urdu. Available at: <https://www.independenturdu.com/node/22666/>

¹⁴ Rehmat, A. (2019) *WHY IS PAKISTAN'S MEDIA IN CRISIS?*, DAWN.COM. Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1495230>

advertising released by the previous Nawaz Sharif administration.¹⁵ During the same period, advertising by private companies has reduced by around 50%.

The ramifications have not just been limited to business closures but failing businesses have driven media owners to yield more easily to increasing pressure from the state.

Regulation of online media

The Khan government introduced an initiative for regulating all forms of media in Pakistan under a single body called the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PMRA). With formal approval from the federal cabinet, PMRA will tighten its control of online media.

So far, a series of measures have been implemented to regulate internet service providers and social media: the ‘Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Rules, 2020’ and the ‘Citizens Protection Rule, 2020’. This law allows content on social media to be removed on the grounds of being obscene, immoral, against Islamic views, or overly critical of the government. If content is not removed, the platform is banned, as TikTok was due to its non-compliance in removing indecent Pakistani content. The law also obligates social media platforms with more than 500,000 users to register with Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and have a physical presence in Pakistan.¹⁶ The platforms are usually given a window of between 24 and 48 hours to respond and remove the content deemed unfit for social media by local authorities.

According to a recent report by PTA, it banned over 16,000 connections, websites links and blogs that included hateful content directed at defence forces and national security. In addition, 22,000 different types of content involving sectarianism were also banned. PTA collaborates with the ministries of Information Technology and Defence to make online spaces “safer” for Pakistanis. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act in the constitution of Pakistan gives PTA the authority to regulate social media in this manner.¹⁷

¹⁵ Shaikh, A. (2017) *The Government as the Nation’s Advertiser*, *Aurora Magazine*. Available at: <https://aurora.dawn.com/news/1141941>

¹⁶ Shaikh, A. (2017) *The Government as the Nation’s Advertiser*, *Aurora Magazine*. Available at: <https://aurora.dawn.com/news/1141941>

¹⁷ *Censoring the internet* (2021). Available at: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/746160-censoring-the-internet>

According to the Annual Pakistan Media Legal Review 2020, launched by the Institute for Research, Advocacy, and Development (IRADA), “There is growing fear and hate in Pakistani online civic spaces.” The report noted that the cybercrime law is used against online news organisations and journalists, with 13 incidents against journalists and human rights activists in 2020. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has also initiated several inquiries and investigations related to journalists’ social media posts and activities. It has become any route to silence journalists, especially if they are accused of publishing or broadcasting anti-state or blasphemous content – the consequences of which are life-threatening.¹⁸

According to the Facebook Transparency Report, the quantity of content banned access to in Pakistan climbed by more than 30% in 2019 – 5,690 items compared to 4,174 in the second half of 2018.¹⁹ Instagram, Facebook’s photo and video-focused social network, blocked 178 items in Pakistan – 171 posts and seven accounts. According to the social media giant, Facebook banned access in Pakistan to articles reported by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) for, “apparently breaking local laws banning blasphemy, anti-judiciary material, defamation, and denunciation of the state’s independence”. There has also been a rise in the requests for user data. It increased by 5.3% from 1,752 accounts in 2018 to 1,849 accounts in 2019.²⁰

Converging problems

This convergence of threats from state and non-state actors has placed Pakistani media in peril, forcing many journalists to quit journalism for other safer and more financially stable occupations. With lay-offs, salary cuts, censorship, and repression of journalists through legislation and other means, the Pakistani media – which holds great potential for digital transitioning – is helplessly shrinking.

Journalists who innovate out of necessity usually turn to digital. Many digital-born Pakistani news organisations, such as Naya Daur, Parhlo.com, and The Current, are founded by Pakistani journalists who started their careers in traditional media. Zebunnisa Burki, deputy editor of Op-Ed at Pakistan’s largest English newspaper, The News, believes that Pakistani journalists have a great potential for digital journalism but that they don’t have the required tools. “A lot of new independent

¹⁸ Reporter, T. (2021) *980,000 links containing objectionable content blocked, PTA tells IHC*, DAWN.COM. Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1604622>

¹⁹ Facebook (2020), <https://transparency.fb.com/data/government-data-requests>

²⁰ Ali, K. (2021) *Internet freedom declined in Pakistan in 2020, says report*, DAWN.COM. Available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1620705>

start-ups and news websites have news instincts for the story but they don't have the tools that are required for a digital story. They haven't been trained in mobile journalism and digital data journalism."²¹

Television broadcasters and news publishers still dominate the scene in Pakistan, even in the digital sphere, meaning most online content is produced first for television or print, and later shared on major social media sites. This means digital content in Pakistan adheres to the same editorial standards and is automatically affected by the same censorship seen in traditional print and television media.

This report examines two successful digital-born news organisations in the Global South that operate in a similarly challenging environment: Rappler in the Philippines and Scroll.in in India. Both organisations are mobile-first, digital-born, and audience-led. Despite being smaller than their legacy media competitors, they have amassed a sizable online following. The aim is to see what lessons can be implemented by Pakistani journalists.

²¹ (www.dw.com), D. (2018) *Pakistan's media on the brink of a digital transition, but struggling to find viable business models* | DW | 09.04.2019, DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistans-media-on-the-brink-of-a-digital-transition-but-struggling-to-find-viable-business-models/a-47922005>

Case Study: Rappler, The Philippines

The Republic of the Philippines in Southeast Asia is home to 110 million people, with internet penetration of 72%. As in Pakistan, television dominates the news media landscape. With greater internet penetration than many other countries in the Global South, 85% of Filipinos use online sources for news, including social media, and 73% of Filipinos use Facebook as the primary source for reading, sharing, and discussing news.²²

The World Press Freedom Index ranking for the Philippines has dropped by two places in the past two years, from 136 to 138.²³ Things changed dramatically after the 2016 elections: publications and journalists who criticised populist President Rodrigo Duterte were targeted more frequently, with threats ranging from insults to state-sponsored legal action. He has demonised journalists, pledging to avenge those who he believes mistreated him during the campaign and those who have criticised his policies, particularly his drug war.

In his war with the media, President Duterte and his supporters have often targeted journalists with verbal insults. The president and his followers have referred to journalists as “prostitutes”, “spies”, “enemies”, and “lowlifes”. Physical assaults have also occurred. Since Duterte took office, an alliance of media organisations reported at least 171 episodes of attacks and threats against the media, including the murder of 15 journalists, according to a report released in May 2020.²⁴

The practice of “red-tagging” in the Philippines has also been reinstated since 2020. It is a malicious blacklisting of individuals or groups that are critical of or do not entirely support the acts of a country’s current government administration. These people and groups are labelled as terrorists, communists, or both. It is a form of instigation that has harmful consequences for those who are subjected to it.²⁵

²² Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S. and Nielsen, R., 2020. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. [online] Available at:

<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf>

²³ *2020 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders* (2021). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>

²⁴ *Philippines : Holding the line against Duterte’s attacks | Reporters without borders* (2021). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/philippines>

²⁵ *Red-tagging in the Philippines - Voa News* (2020). Available at:

<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/deadly-red-tagging-campaign-ramps-philippines&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1628512655425000&usg=AOvVaw1V2Jy2wOBROVBJCM3DAt1j>

The Cyber Libel law passed in 2012 to combat internet scourges like spamming, fraud, child pornography, and identity theft is now being used to attack journalists.²⁶ In 2020, 27 libel and cyber libel cases were filed against Filipino journalists.²⁷

Media trust in the Philippines has dramatically declined – as low as 27%. The most targeted outlets have suffered, while those that have evaded the president’s anger have fared better. ABS-CBN, the country’s major radio and television network, has taken the worst of the damage so far.²⁸

Rappler, one of the country’s most nimble news outlets, is the place where the debate over press freedom, digital innovation and independent journalism have really played out.

What is Rappler?

Rappler was founded in July 2011 as a Facebook page known as MovePh (Move Philippines) and launched as a website in January 2012. It is built on three pillars: journalism, community, and technology, all of which are united by the shared principles of trust, courage, and honesty.²⁹ It was founded by a group of four investigative journalists and editors known among their colleagues as “the manangs”, a Tagalog phrase that means “elder sisters”.³⁰

Rappler’s founders recognised early on that to maintain editorial freedom, it needed to have a sound business model. In an interview for this report, Rappler’s editor for public trust agenda, investigations and research, Miriam Grace A. Go, highlighted four main pillars of Rappler’s financial model: advertising, native content (an in-house team of writers create sponsored content for the BrandRap section), Rappler-plus membership programme (regular and advanced access to the exclusive content available monthly, quarterly or annually), and donations. Foreign aid

²⁶ *Philippine leader defends controversial 'cyber libel' law* (2021). Available at: <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-philippine-leader-defends-controversial-cyber.html>

²⁷ Peña, D. (2021) *Philippine press freedom ranking slides down on 3rd year - Bulatlat, Bulatlat*. Available at: <https://www.bulatlat.com/2021/04/20/philippine-press-freedom-ranking-slides-down-on-3rd-year/>

²⁸ Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S. and Nielsen, R., 2020. *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*. [online] Available at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf

²⁹ *Rappler's mission statement* (2021). Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/about/mission-statement-journalism-communities-technology>

³⁰ Anderson, K., 2017. *Beyond the Article: Frontiers of editorial and commercial education*. Digital News Report 2017. [online] Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Beyond%20the%20Article%20-%20Frontiers%20of%20Editorial%20and%20Commercial%20Innovation.pdf>

organisations and governmental organisations in the Philippines have also been a key source of financing for certain initiatives.

“We shape our content according to the needs of our audiences. When people find the content that fits their needs, they are naturally drawn to it,” said Go. Through extensive social media reach, Rappler mainly focuses on young audiences, predominantly English speaking millennials and Gen Zs.

In recent years, Rappler has started translating special reports into Cebuano and producing a weekly editorial piece in Filipino, one of the national languages of the Philippines. According to Go, Rappler is working on a campaign to deliver content in eight major languages of the Philippines and distribute it in those specific areas. Most exclusive content available through Rappler-plus membership is consumed by older audiences, policymakers, and key decision-makers.

Rappler’s website has 10 million unique visitors every month. It has a following of 4.6 million on Facebook, 3.4 million on Twitter, 432,000 on Instagram and 960,000 on YouTube. Facebook and Twitter are Rappler’s primary audience engagement and distribution channels where its breaking news, investigative content, and sports content are shared. Rappler engages its audiences for community action through its civic engagement account “Move” on both these platforms. Rappler also reaches its audiences through newsletters for special events (Covid-19, elections coverage), updates for general subscribers, and exclusive content for Rappler-plus members (for example, behind-the-scenes footage before interviews are aired).

Rappler is recognised for its investigative stories, but since the very start it has aimed to produce multimedia content. As Go put it: “It’s not just our reporters; even our researchers and staff from other units, they all have multimedia skills.” They also engage their audiences through audio-based platforms such as Spotify or Apple Podcasts, where their reporters produce their podcasts on engaging stories.

Most of the content produced by Rappler is focused on national news, but Rappler has been trying to strengthen its local news offering. “The aim is to cover the provincial news the same way we cover the national news,” Go said. Rappler has also ventured into cross-border reporting by partnering with news organisations in other countries.

Rappler is currently based in Manila and last year it inaugurated a bureau in the province of Cebu.

In Manila, they have a staff of over 100 people. The staff is predominantly female, including the top leadership. The bureau in Cebu is relatively small, with only four staff members. According to Go, Rappler is a young organisation and most of the staff is multimedia savvy. “Maria [our editor] usually calls them the digital natives.”

Unwavering journalism through political pressure and censorship

Rappler has made fighting what it describes as state-sponsored disinformation its primary business and reporting strategy. This attracts an audience supportive of its accountability journalism.³¹ It also attracts attention from the state: after six months in power, President Rodrigo Duterte falsely claimed that Rappler is entirely owned by Americans in his July 2017 national address. Thereafter, a line of charges followed against Rappler and its CEO, Maria Ressa (who is a member of the Reuters Institute advisory board).

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) ordered Rappler’s licence be revoked in January 2018. There are at least eight ongoing court cases against Ressa and Rappler’s directors, a Rappler reporter, and a former researcher, as of February 4, 2021.³²

Ressa was initially arrested in February 2019 in connection with a cyber libel case filed by the Department of Justice. The case emerged following a seven-year investigative story published on Rappler’s website in May 2012.³³

Currently, Rappler is the Philippines’ largest journalist-owned media company and a verified signatory to the International Fact-Checking Network’s Code of Principles. Time Magazine named Ressa and her staff on its Person of the Year list in 2018 for contributions to journalism. Ressa was also named to the publication’s Most Influential People list in April 2019.³⁴

³¹ Posetti, J., Simon, F. and Shabbir, N., 2019. *Lessons in Innovation: How International News Organisations Combat Disinformation through Mission-Driven Journalism..* Journalism Innovation Project. [online] Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-04/Posetti_Lessons_in_Innovation_FINAL.pdf>

³² *LIST: Cases vs Maria Ressa, Rappler directors, staff since 2018* (2019). Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/list-cases-filed-against-maria-ressa-rappler-reporters>

³³ *FAQs: What you need to know about Rappler’s cyber libel case* (2019). Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/about/frequently-asked-questions-cyber-libel-case>

³⁴ *Legal battle between president Duterte and Maria Ressa's Rappler shows the Philippines 'dark reality' and sends some fact-checkers to therapy* - Poynter (2019). Available at: <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2019/legal-battle-between-president-duterte-and-maria-ressas-rappler-shows-the-philippines-dark-reality-and-sends-fact-checkers-to-therapy/>

Game-changers: Rappler's most innovative digital storytelling practices

Big data investigations: "Sock puppet networks"

The torrent of abuse and threats of violence against Rappler increased drastically when it released a feature series charting the destructive effects of organised political trolling on Philippine social media in October 2016. The series used data analysis techniques to discover a "sock puppet network" of 26 bogus Facebook profiles that influenced nearly three million other accounts in the Philippines. Three "super trolls" as Rappler defines them, were behind the "sock puppets".³⁵ The series was launched in three parts. The first part focused on paid propaganda. Part two dissected the novel information ecosystem, its impact on social cognition, and possibilities to exploit its flaws. The third part concentrated on the 26 fake Facebook accounts which formed a network to influence almost three million accounts in the Philippines.³⁶

Server size: "Shark Tank"

Shark Tank is a database that can store more than a terabyte of information to monitor disinformation networks, and has been expanded with artificial intelligence technology. Rappler formed a research team around the "Shark Tank" who specialise in data validation, network validation and more analysis. This eventually led to an information research partnership with Facebook, which has now evolved into a business relationship.³⁷

Under the current workflow, Rappler journalists and social media producers spot false news (online and offline). The research team studies and analyses the links and interactions to map the process of generating and disseminating disinformation. In January 2019, using the Shark Tank, Rappler initiated a second takedown of counterfeit accounts in the Philippines, which were later banned by Facebook. Rappler also found an unusual connection of these accounts to the Internet Research Agency and Russian disinformation.³⁸

³⁵ Posetti, J., 2017. Fighting back against prolific online harassment: Maria Ressa. *An attack on one is an attack on all: Successful initiatives to protect journalists and combat impunity*, pp.37-40.

³⁶ *Propaganda war: Weaponizing the internet* (2016). Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/propaganda-war-weaponizing-internet>

³⁷ Posetti, J., Simon, F. and Shabbir, N., 2019. *Lessons in Innovation: How International News Organisations Combat Disinformation through Mission-Driven Journalism..* Journalism Innovation Project. [online] Available at: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-04/Posetti_Lessons_in_Innovation_FINAL.pdf

³⁸ Posetti, J., Simon, F. and Shabbir, N., 2019. *Lessons in Innovation: How International News Organisations Combat Disinformation through Mission-Driven Journalism..* Journalism Innovation Project. [online] Available

Facebook chatbot: “RapRap”

Rappler launched a chatbot on Facebook to encourage users to take a closer look at their content. It is a simple chat application that allows users to ask basic questions or enter keywords to get links to information on the Rappler website. Gemma Bagayaua Mendoza, head of content and strategy research at Rappler, said she also sought to use chatbots in large-scale corruption reporting practices.³⁹

The chatbot enables Rappler to highlight more content from their website than the content shown by Facebook’s algorithms. In the first phase of the development, they hired two programmers to develop the RapRap chatbot. Once it was activated, users could send short messages to the bot, for instance, “top stories” to get the title of the story, or enter keywords that led them to all the related stories on Rappler’s website. They are now working on making the robot more human so that users could ask, “What happened in Mindanao?”, and the chatbot will respond with a list of news articles, events and happenings in that area.⁴⁰

Engagement: Mood Meter

The Mood Meter allows readers to indicate the emotion that is evoked by any given Rappler story. Options include happy, sad, angry, neutral, inspirational, scared, funny or angry. Rappler developed these emotional categories with the help of a team of psychologists. The Mood Meter adds data into the bigger Mood Navigator, which determines the day’s mood and, as per the result, gives a mood breakdown, story-by-story. In an interview with the Nieman Lab, Ressa said: “The idea behind the Mood Meter is getting people to crowdsource the mood for the day.” The Mood Navigator gives a “gamified” feeling to the story and enables readers to interact. It also helped in showing

at:<[https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-04/Posetti_Lessons_in_Innovation_FINAL.p
df](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-04/Posetti_Lessons_in_Innovation_FINAL.pdf)>

³⁹ Anderson, K., 2017. Beyond the Article: Frontiers of editorial and commercial education. Digital News Report 2017. [online] Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Beyond%20the%20Article%20-%20Frontiers%20of%20Editorial%20and%20Commercial%20Innovation.pdf>

⁴⁰ Anderson, K., 2017. Beyond the Article: Frontiers of editorial and commercial education. Digital News Report 2017. [online] Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Beyond%20the%20Article%20-%20Frontiers%20of%20Editorial%20and%20Commercial%20Innovation.pdf>

how emotions flow in their society. In the newsroom, it allows journalists to tell who stories have resonated with the community.⁴¹

Crowdsourcing: “Project Agos”

In 2013, Rappler launched a crowdsourcing project called Agos. It was an initiative that brought together the Philippine government, the private sector and Filipino citizens to respond to Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda. Rappler designed maps to publish reports that called for help directly on their website. Then it published all the information provided by those affected, including their telephone numbers, names and addresses.⁴²

At the beginning of the project, Rappler introduced a telephone number (7622), which could be used free of charge during the typhoon. Smart, Globe, and Sun Cellular subscribers in the Philippines could use this number or use predefined keywords to send emergency calls for free.

All user-contributed data, such as help requests and location reports, were identified and plotted through an automated process onto a map that was accessible to the public. Project Agos allowed the creation of geological risk maps and population density/distribution, which could also be used as a basis for relief programme setting and policy planning.⁴³

⁴¹ LaFrance, A. (2021) In the Philippines, Rappler is trying to figure out the role of emotion in the news, Nieman Lab. Available at: <https://www.niemanlab.org/2012/08/in-the-philippines-rappler-is-trying-to-figure-out-the-role-of-emotion-in-the-news/>

⁴² Turk, C. (2020) "Any Portal in a Storm? Collaborative and crowdsourced maps in response to Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan, Philippines", *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 28(4), pp. 416-431. doi: 10.1111/1468-5973.12330.

⁴³ #ProjectAgos: One-stop shop for climate change (2013). Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/project-agos-climate-change>

Case Study: Scroll.in, India

India shares a common border with Pakistan. It has a total population of 1.38 billion, making it the second-most populous country in the world. Its internet penetration is 40.6% which has increased by 6.6% in the last two years.⁴⁴ India is one of the fastest-growing economies not just in Asia, but in the world.

The size of India is a crucial factor in its media infrastructure. There are over 900 private satellite television channels, with around half of them devoted to the news broadcast. Over 118,000 publications are registered with the Registrar of Newspapers, including over 36,000 weekly magazines.⁴⁵ The combined newspaper readership total is more than 400 million, driven by a burgeoning middle class. Although the country has over 550 FM radio stations, only the public All India Radio may produce news programming.⁴⁶

The country's cultural and ethnic diversity do not translate into a wide range of supply: the highest audience figures go to only 58 top news organisations in India. India's print media market is similarly heavily concentrated. Within the national Hindi language market, four publications – Dainik Jagran, Hindustan, Amar Ujala, and Dainik Bhaskar – account for three out of every four readers (76.45% reading share). Similarly, regional language media markets are also highly concentrated: in each of these market groups, the top two newspapers account for more than half of total readership. For example, out of five Tamil newspapers, the top two publications have a two-thirds reader share. In the Telugu language market, the newspapers Eanadu and Sakshi attract 71.13% of the readership. This pattern is repeated in all regional languages, including Bengali, Oriya, Punjabi, Kannada, Gujarati, Urdu, Marathi, and Assamese.⁴⁷

In terms of online news, India is rapidly becoming a mobile-first audience like the rest of the world. Social media behemoths like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter have carved out a sizable market in India. Many Indian publishers are

⁴⁴ Alphabetical List of Countries - Internet Indicators - ISO3316 (2021). Available at: <https://www.internetworldstats.com/list2.htm>

⁴⁵ *India profile - Media* (2019). Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12557390>

⁴⁶ *Media Ownership Monitor: Who owns the media in India?* | Reporters without borders (2019). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/news/media-ownership-monitor-who-owns-media-india>

⁴⁷ *Media Ownership Monitor: Who owns the media in India?* | Reporters without borders (2019). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/news/media-ownership-monitor-who-owns-media-india>

investing in content designed for these platforms to reach online consumers through these proxies. While the platform's algorithms and broader strategy are constantly evolving and difficult to predict, editors and journalists in many online news organisations seek to ensure that their news content performs well on Facebook. At the same time, media organisations have increased their investment in improving websites, hiring digital journalists and developers, app development and launch, and testing innovative technologies in response to the exponential growth of mobile web access and decline in print readership and advertising.⁴⁸

It hasn't been straightforward for Indian media and journalists. In addition to the practise of internet shutdowns to disrupt communications, the newly enacted Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code provides the government with authority to censor, force takedowns, and ban information without recourse to appeal. Independent digital organisations have labelled the code illegal and damaging to democracy and have contested the government's effort to over-regulate media in the country's highest court.⁴⁹

In addition to attempting to regulate independent digital media, which quickly became significant stakeholders in the Indian media landscape, the government clamped down on social media communication that it deemed critical of the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. New media policies in Jammu and Kashmir were also met with scepticism by journalists, given that it authorises government personnel to take action on content that they label "fake news" or "anti-national content".

Allegations of disinformation and rumour-mongering were levelled at media and even ordinary individuals for revealing the reality of a severe scarcity of medical supplies, oxygen, and overcrowded hospitals and crematoria. While content sceptical of the government was removed, severe hate speech against minorities and sexist rhetoric flourished online in India. Twitter and Facebook also agreed to government removal orders.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Aneez, Z., Ahmed Neyazi, T., Kalogeropoulos, A. and Kleis Nielsen, R., 2021. *Reuters Institute India Digital News Report*. [online] Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-03/India_DNR_FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁹ *Pandemic, the Press and the New Digital Order* (2021). Available at: <https://freespeechcollective.in/2021/05/04/pandemic-the-press-and-the-new-digital-order/>

⁵⁰ Kavitha Iyer, A. (2021) *India has launched a sharp assault on press freedom – but independent media is determined to resist*, *Scroll.in*.

In RSF's 2019 World Press Freedom Index, India has dropped from 138 to 140 out of 180 nations.⁵¹ Between 2010 and 2020, 154 Indian journalists were arrested or faced government action – 40% were arrested in 2020 alone.⁵²

What is Scroll.in?

Scroll.in was founded in January 2014 by Scroll Media Incorporation, the parent company. It was formed by CEO Samir Patil, veteran journalist Naresh Fernandes, and Jennifer O'Brien, former head of the business development department at a travel start-up, Trablbr.⁵³

Scroll.in sees itself as an independent news, information, and entertainment enterprise. It aims to cover the most important political and cultural stories impacting debate in India through meticulous reporting, impartial analysis, and expert opinion. Scroll.in adheres to the essential values of conventional journalism, such as fairness, impartiality, on-the-ground reporting, source cross-checking, and avoidance of conjecture, even as it develops new means of presenting and sharing journalistic stories. According to its editor, Naresh Fernandes, Scroll.in's commitment to journalistic quality helps it stand out in India's crowded media market.⁵⁴

In an interview conducted for this report, Scroll.in's Deputy Editor Rohan Venkataramakrishnan said Scroll.in is read by 10 million unique readers every month, from India and around the globe. The majority of their readership is young (English-speaking Millennials) and urban, and 90% of Scroll.in's audience accesses their content through mobile phones.

In parallel with its editorial team, Scroll.in employs a separate distribution team tasked with understanding how to maximise reach through search engines and social media algorithms. Scroll.in aims to be easily accessible whenever and wherever people choose to read it. To this end, they have developed a simple and

⁵¹ *Media Ownership Monitor: Who owns the media in India?* | Reporters without borders (2019). Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/news/media-ownership-monitor-who-owns-media-india>

⁵² Mantri, G. (2021) *67 journalists arrested, detained, questioned in India in 2020 for their work*, *The News Minute*. Available at: <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/67-journalists-arrested-detained-questioned-india-2020-their-work-140963>

⁵³ *The New Digital Newsroom* | *Forbes India* (2021). Available at: <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/big-bet/the-new-digital-newsroom/44139/1>

⁵⁴ Sen, A. and Kleis Nielsen, R., 2021. *Digital Journalism Start-Ups in India*. [online] Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/Digital%20Journalism%20Start-ups%20in%20India_0.pdf>

responsive website, an Android app, email newsletters, a range of social media channels, including on LinkedIn and Reddit.⁵⁵ Facebook drives a large chunk of its engagement with 1.7 million followers, Twitter 418,700, and YouTube 378,000 subscribers.

Venkataramakrishnan said there is also a video team at Scroll.in that works independently of the editorial team. Their video content is mainly available on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. It also has a partnership with Deutsche Welle, a German state-owned international broadcaster, to produce a series of videos called 'Eco India'.

Scroll.in previously experimented with many approaches to generate revenue, but currently, it relies on advertising, direct reader revenue, subscriptions and membership offers, as well as contributions and donations to their reporting fund.

When Scroll.in was launched, its parent company, The Scroll Media Incorporation, received initial funding from the Omidyar Network, which is a company of the billionaire entrepreneur Pierre Omidyar, the founder of eBay and Media Development Investment Fund (MIDF), a New York based non-for-profit corporation which provides financing to independent news businesses.

Unwavering journalism through political pressure and censorship

In June 2021, a group of Indian ministers met more than six times to chart out ways to “neutralise” independent journalists and news organisations like Scroll.in.⁵⁶

On June 13, an FIR was filed against Scroll’s executive editor and former Reuters Institute Journalist Fellow Supriya Sharma on multiple charges of printing defamatory matter. She is also booked under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Indian Penal Code.

Sharma was granted protection from immediate arrest by the Allahabad High Court, but it has permitted the investigation to continue. This happened only because Sharma interviewed a resident from a village embraced by Prime Minister Modi in Uttar Pradesh for a story published on June 8, 2020, titled “In Varanasi village

⁵⁵ Scroll.in (2021). Available at: <http://india.mom-rsf.org/en/media/detail/outlet/scrollin/>

⁵⁶ Modi Govt's Digital Media Rules Framed After Ministers Wanted to 'Neutralise' Independent News (2021). Available at: <https://thewire.in/media/modi-govt-digital-media-rules-group-of-ministers>

adopted by Prime Minister Modi, people went hungry during the lockdown.” In the FIR, the police also identified the editor-in-chief of Scroll.in.⁵⁷

Sharma is not the only Scroll.in journalist who has faced ire for her reporting. Malini Subramaniam and her 14-year-old daughter were evicted from their home in the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh in 2016 after police threatened her landlord.⁵⁸

Game-changers: Scroll.in’s most innovative digital storytelling practices

Scroll.in’s business strategy is premised on the idea that advertisers will increasingly turn to digital media as internet and smartphone use increases. If a website offers a higher quality digital experience in terms of content and technology, it may attract a more desirable audience, allowing it to sell advertising at a higher price since its launch. Scroll.in has adopted and experimented with innovative ways to engage with its audiences and generate revenue.

Business: Ad-free Scroll+

In March 2018, Scroll.in transitioned to a subscription-based business model, Scroll+, which offers ad-free news delivery and access to four years of archives to members. The current cost of Scroll+’s subscription is \$4 monthly, \$15 quarterly, and \$50 annually. Scroll.in also has a bookshop on its website where its readers can buy notable and interesting books on editorial recommendations.

Scroll.in’s free site has, on average, five ads per story. Its CEO Samir Patil has said native advertising and sponsored content are key.⁵⁹

Paying for online news is still not a very well-established concept in India but has progressed in the last few years. “It is an evolving conversation, but I wouldn’t say that we are at stage one,” Venkataramakrishnan told me. “We have seen quite a bit of evolution in India over the last decade, but the default in India is still very much towards free ad-supported content online. A few news organisations have experimented with soft and hard paywalls. I

⁵⁷ Staff, S. (2020) *Scroll.in’s Supriya Sharma gets protection from arrest in FIR filed for report on impact of lockdown*, Scroll.in. Available at: <https://scroll.in/latest/971472/scroll-ins-supriya-sharma-gets-protection-from-arrest-in-fir-filed-for-report-on-impact-of-lockdown>

⁵⁸ *Case History: Malini Subramaniam* (2016). Available at:

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/case-history-malini-subramaniam>

⁵⁹ Sen, A. and Kleis Nielsen, R., 2021. *Digital Journalism Start-Ups in India*. [online] Available at:

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/Digital%20Journalism%20Start-ups%20in%20India_0.pdf

wouldn't say there's anything conclusive yet. I don't think anyone has cracked the model successfully in India.”

Engagement: Scroll Exchange

In a digital world, success is primarily measured through engagement – for example, sharing, commenting, and dwell time. Scroll Exchange is a section on Scroll.in's website that invites readers to “Follow and debate on the day's most significant stories”.⁶⁰

It allows the audience to participate as contributors through comments. Many readers feel more connected when they have direct or close access to the newsroom. The website allows readers to share their thoughts, criticism, analysis, and expertise, but comments are moderated according to a set of standards for conversations and observations. The standards specify that name-calling and shouting (posting in all capital letters), as well as attacks on someone's ethnicity, religion, caste, disability, or gender, are not tolerated to maintain a sense of decorum.

The website guarantees that comments are not altered, but because a human administrator checks all comments, they only appear after being approved. As a result, the number of comments monitored per day is restricted: only specific stories have a closed comment area. This section also accepts criticism, suggestions, and unique perspectives on Scroll.in and its articles.

Product: ScrollStack

ScrollStack was co-founded by Scroll's CEO Samir Patil and Ritesh Mehta, the founder and chief operating officer of ScrollStack. It is a service that assists individuals in creating and sharing material about which they are enthusiastic. It enables them to monetise their material by charging people to access it. ScrollStack's primary function is to distribute and promote material to people interested in it and help creators earn through their content. This platform is also advertisement-supported.⁶¹

ScrollStack allows you to publish content such as articles, photographs, videos, links, and other files. Users are free to post whatever they like as long as it adheres to ScrollStack's community standards. To become a creator, one

⁶⁰ *Scroll Exchange - Follow and debate the latest news stories of the day* (2021). Available at: <https://scroll.in/community>

⁶¹ *Terms of use* (2021). Available at: <https://scrollstack.com/terms>

must be invited by ScrollStack or another ScrollStack creator. Users can generate engaging articles, reports, and other works that their followers will be able to view for free, with registration, or for a fee. ScrollStack receives the money on the user's behalf and manages all of the associated operations.⁶² ScrollStack is available to users outside India, except those sanctioned by the United States. It is not available to content creators who will cause ScrollStack to violate or otherwise be subject to U.S. sanctions. An innovative feature of ScrollStack, which makes it stand out among other similar services, is its ability to distribute on WhatsApp. India has the most significant WhatsApp market with 390.1 million monthly active users.⁶³ ScrollStack has a one-click feature that converts posts to mobile-optimised WhatsApp ready PDFs, which can be shared with personal contacts, groups, and broadcast lists on WhatsApp.

⁶² *Terms of use* (2021). Available at: <https://scrollstack.com/terms>

⁶³ *WhatsApp 2021 User Statistics: How Many People Use WhatsApp?* (2021). Available at: <https://backlinko.com/whatsapp-users#top-10-whatsapp-countries-by-audience-by-audience>

Prepping journalists for a digital transition

Every day, despite the obstacles, Pakistani journalists get out there and make it happen. However, when it comes to taking truly digital approaches, we continue to rely on the lessons learned in our traditional newsrooms.

Regardless of your medium, one thing remains the same for all journalists: it is critical that we understand the facts of the story and that our research, interviewing, and writing skills are up to par.

But Pakistani media is on the cusp of a digital transformation. With increasing internet penetration in Pakistan and greater opportunities in the digital news media market, it is time to fully comprehend the skills required to produce truly digital content. More than ever, it is critical to analyse, reflect, and act on our self-development to remain competitive. So what are the essential skills and tools for developing stronger digital journalists in Pakistan?

Build your smartphone kit

The days of a four- to five-member crew driving up to a location to cover a story are long gone, or will soon be in Pakistan. If you have a smartphone and a good camera, you don't need a crew. Riyaad Minty, the Director of Digital at TRT and one of the founding members of AJ+, told me: "Some of the world's most famous creators are producing on their phones. There is no excuse not to create content right now because it is so simple."

This single device serves as your portal to the digital world. To work independently, you'll need accessories. Purchase a low-cost tripod with a removable phone mount, a sturdy selfie stick, a wired or non-wired microphone based on your budget, a pair of earphones, a power bank, and a backpack.

Be sure you can quickly edit videos in easy-to-use applications like iMovie, which is sometimes pre-installed on iPhones, or Inshot or Viva video on Android phones.

Learn all of the useful features to increase the quality and pace of your production. Choose a provider with a steady internet connection, and share files with the newsroom via free online file-sharing services such as WeTransfer.

Master all the basics

Since many digital journalists operate in more than one medium, they must have similar basic abilities as their broadcast or print counterparts. If you are a journalist working in a conventional media newsroom and want to transition to digital, learn how to write for an anchor or a news package, build a large contact list, and improve your picture- and video-editing abilities.

Journalists should become acquainted with timeline-based video editing tools.

Adobe Premiere Pro and Final Cut Pro are the professional video editing softwares most commonly used in Pakistan and throughout the world, but a comparable timeline-based software, 'Filmora', is available online; familiarise yourself with the basic technique.

"We always look for a journalist that is outstanding at research, can work in the field independently, can make [photographs] look good in Photoshop with their editing skills, and rapidly edit a video on Premiere Pro," Laureano Pérez Izquierdo, Director of Infobae America, Argentina told me. Infobae is one of the most successful digital-born news organisations in the Global South, as well as one of the most widely read news websites in the Spanish-speaking world. When discussing the abilities required for digital journalists, he emphasised the need of mastering all fundamentals and working quickly.

Similarly, Talha Ahad, CEO of The Centrum Media (TCM), Pakistan's first digital news network specialising in video storytelling, told me: "Digital journalists must be informed of local and global issues, and also able to film, edit, and write a screenplay. They should be able to conduct interviews using their phones or Zoom. Above all, they should be able to summarise a paragraph in two lines."

Learn the business

Scroll.in's deputy editor, Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, told me: "It is critical for journalists to grasp the business strategies of their organisations."

Journalists must understand how the organisations they work for remain sustainable. Discussing money or business is not a typical practise in Pakistani newsrooms. It can be deemed prying or intrusive to do so, but it doesn't mean learning the news business is impossible.

According to Venkataramakrishnan, the best place to learn the principles is in journalism schools or even at the basic training level of a company. "Keep an eye on how the media is funded in general. Journalists are sometimes wilfully unaware of this aspect of journalism. Journalists should acquire an interest, and knowing the fundamentals is always beneficial."

Know your audience

“First and foremost, it is critical for a digital journalist to understand their audience deeply,” Ahad of TCM said. Once you've determined your target audience, the fundamental motto in writing for digital is to keep it simple, write to be discovered. Remember that a digital consumer is well-informed and has many alternatives. The conventional reporting style on Pakistani media differs significantly from the generally recognised pattern of written or video reporting on social media. The language is not sensationalised, it is straightforward.

Miriam Grace Go from digital news organisation Rappler said: “We shape our content according to the needs of our audiences. When people find the content that fits their needs, they are naturally drawn to it.”

Whether writing an article or creating a digital video, an organised framework is required. Consider an inverted pyramid. “The first five seconds of your video are the most significant,” said TRT’s Minty, and so are the initial few paragraphs of your article. Retain the most relevant information first and the broader base of facts thereafter.

Keep updating your technical knowledge

Most editors in Pakistani newsrooms are not in their 20s or 30s: they have extensive understanding of the media sector and many Pakistani concerns, but may not be up to date with internet trends. Your comprehension of internet and social media trends can make you a useful employee.

Train each other

Staff at Rappler train each other, Go told me. “For instance, the court reporter teaches court jargon to other staff members, or the tech team teaches [data] analysing and researching techniques.” Rappler also offers continuous learning by inviting speakers and experts from outside to train their staff. This is a culture that should be adopted in Pakistani newsrooms too.

Smash your apps

Greg Kulowiec, a former history teacher and current edtech specialist, created the phrase “app smashing”. He described app smashing as, “the technique of using many applications in combination with one another to execute a final job or assignment.” It's a word more typically associated with educational technology, but can be applied to digital journalism, too. First and foremost, choose a few applications that you are familiar with and incorporate them into your daily routine.

For example, using Notes with Voice memos and iMovie and Collect, you can create a simple digital video with subtitles and send it to the newsroom.

In this example, you would use 'Notes' to write the script and subtitles for your film, 'Voice memos' to record the voiceover, 'iMovie' to combine the video, audio, and text, and 'Collect' from WeTransfer to deliver it.

A daily dose of social media

Social media helps you engage with your audience, and can be a great tool for finding fresh and intriguing leads, creating new contacts, researching your topic, or sharing your work with a large audience. The social media platforms that are extensively used for information sharing in Pakistan, are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok. Understanding Twitter and Instagram are also required to create your digital profile.

As journalists, we are taught to write for TV, print, or news websites, but we must also learn to write for social media. As a digital journalist, you must understand how to create platform-specific content. If you have a solid grasp of content production on key platforms, it might lead to greater opportunities in Pakistan and beyond.

Showcase your work

As a digital or multimedia journalist, you are expected to work in a variety of mediums. It is critical to have an online platform where you can present all of that work, or at least the finest examples of it. Some journalists find it appealing to have a public Facebook profile with a large following that highlights their reach and influence on social media. This does not showcase your work in a user-friendly and creative manner. Look instead for websites that can assist you in creating online portfolios; there are many templates available. Getting a domain that includes your name is seen as extremely professional in some places.

Up your CV and LinkedIn game

For many years, Pakistan's job culture has been based on personal relationships or contacts: having a Curriculum Vitae (CV) was only a formality. With the rise of digital, your CV and online presence have become critical. Keep your CV up to date in the most recent formats. If you apply through a portal for a high-demand position, ensure your CV is in a readable format (.doc, not .pdf), so that it can be read by software used for applicant tracking or analysis.

Once your CV has been revised, create a LinkedIn profile. When it comes to networking and seeking a job, this website is really useful. Use it to find in-demand

skills and experiences. Read the job descriptions for the professions you're interested in, and organisations you are interested in working for, and assess your present skill set to evaluate the gaps you need to address to fit in with growth-oriented digital media organisations.

Conclusion

Despite the myriad political, economic and technical challenges faced by Pakistani media organisations, we cannot continue to blindly pursue television and publishing strategies alone.

As internet penetration grows in Pakistan, the shift of advertising spend to online platforms – where companies have the ability to better target customers and track performance of their ads – is inevitable.

Forward-thinking media companies will start planning now: who is being hired to create what content and services for what audiences? How will they package and sell those audiences to ensure profitability?

Pakistani journalists need to think digital to act digital. Like the rest of the world, the Pakistani media landscape is transitioning to digital. The conventional skills of journalists – researching, writing, and reporting – are still invaluable, but a more versatile skill set is now expected of them.

Both Scroll.in and Rappler have implemented successful reader revenue programmes, both have found content quality is key to the success of those programmes.

Developers and data analysts play a key role in both of these newsrooms, and key positions are created to manage audience distribution. Journalists in these newsrooms, as I outlined in the previous chapter, are a different breed – capable of filing the same story in multiple mediums and for multiple platforms.

Jack Welch, the former chairman of General Electric, once said: “Change before you have to.” For those willing to embrace the changing tide by committing to quality journalism practices that attract loyal audiences, the potential for success is vast.