

Digital ventures boost ailing news media, study shows

WASHINGTON, US: Online news ventures have added nearly 5,000 US media jobs in the past few years, boosting an industry that is still reeling from technology changes, a study showed on Wednesday.



(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

The Pew Research Center's "State of the News Media 2014" report said these digital ventures are creating a more varied set of financial models for news, offering some hope to the troubled sector.

The Pew report said the largest number of journalists producing original reporting are still at newspapers, whose woes have deepened - with employment down 6.4% in 2012 and more losses likely in 2013 when final figures are tallied.

And the news business, which generates some \$60bn in annual revenues, still relies on advertising for nearly 70% of its money.

But the online segment is gaining traction and pointing to successful new models, the Pew researchers said.

"New players are boosting reporting power, technological talent and financial resources going into news, creating a level of energy not felt for a long time," said Amy Mitchell, director of journalism research for Pew.

While most newspapers have failed to generate significant revenues from their digital editions, some online news ventures are moving away from the ad-based model, getting support from philanthropists, venture capitalists and other methods such as conferences and events, Pew noted.

These ventures "are spurring different ways to think about how to support journalism in the digital age," said Pew research Mark Jurkowitz.

But Pew cautioned that "this growing investment in digital news does not mean the industry has figured out a consistent

formula for monetising that news."

According to Pew, 30 of the largest digital-only news organisations account for nearly 3,000 jobs, and one big area of investment is global coverage.

Pew noted that Vice Media has 35 overseas bureaus, while the Huffington Post hopes to grow to 15 countries from 11 this year.

Other digital ventures growing overseas coverage include BuzzFeed and Atlantic Media's Quartz. This comes at a time when international reporters working for US newspapers have declined 24% from 2003 to 2010, according to Pew.

Pew said the gains at digital ventures have only modestly offset the losses in print, estimated at more than 16,000 newsroom jobs at newspapers and 38,000 in magazines from 2003 to 2012.

But the study said digital is showing strong journalistic efforts in some cases.

"Many digital outlets are working to fill reporting gaps created by the strain on resources at traditional outlets - from niche topic areas like education to international coverage to local community news to investigative journalism," the report said.

The researchers said social media and mobile platforms are also transforming the news business. They found 50% of social network users share or repost news stories, images or videos, and 46% discuss news issues or events on social networks.

More than one out ten online news consumers have submitted their own content - videos, photos, articles or opinion pieces - to news websites or blogs, the report found.

About a third of US adults watch digital news videos, and news outlets like the Huffington Post have been expanding into video, the report noted.

Traditional television has seen mixed results, Pew said. Its analysis of Nielsen data showed fewer Americans watched cable news in 2013, while more tuned into network or local television news - the first increase for local TV news in five years.

Pew found fewer local TV stations in 2013 producing original news compared with 2012, a phenomenon driven by ownership changes and content-sharing deals. The study found a quarter of the 952 US television stations that air newscasts do not produce the programs they air.

For cable, the combined median prime-time viewership of the three major news channels - CNN, Fox News and MSNBC - dropped 11% to about three million, the smallest it has been since 2007.

The biggest decline came at MSNBC, which lost 24% of its prime-time audience. CNN saw a 13% drop and Fox's audience dipped 6%, Pew said.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge