



The Gap between Theory and Practice: A comparative analysis of academia and media industry in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – Pakistan

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Abstract

Today's journalism graduates are entering a constantly evolving field because of information technology and the emergence of social media. For decades, the gap between journalism education and journalism practice has been a focus of debate in the field and academia. This research attempts to reexamine the gaps between two important institutions of journalism. The study finds if there is still a gap between the curriculum taught at journalism schools and practices carried out in the media industry and the reasons behind it. The experts in both disciplines have been interviewed qualitatively to develop recommendations for viable solutions to the problem. The study concludes that this gap can be reduced through a close liaison between the academicians and journalists working in the field for a long.

Key Words: Journalism, Media Education, Media Industry, Social Media, Digitization, Theory and Practice

Introduction



According to (Denman, C. 1995), media education provides students with more robust information and connects them with the world. Social network groups can boost knowledge and awareness of the different social networks. In this way, the students can think more critically about the happenings in the world without being biased or keeping themselves in a nutshell. Students of any age can improve their reading abilities, learning power, social involvement, community collaboration, and literacy. Media literacy includes social media and advanced education in old media, television, and print media like newspapers, magazines, and posters. Media education fosters the competency of students to work in groups which will benefit society (Blom, R., & Davenport, L. D 2012).

(Hanna, M., & Sanders, K 2007) argues that media practitioners, on the other hand, are the people working in the media field as journalists, reporters, editors, producers, broadcasters, and public relations officers. They had to be good listeners, observers, and creative, have critical and curious minds and should be honest with their profession. The field lacks educated, responsible and integrated media workers, which is why there can always be a gap between what is taught in journalism schools and what is practiced in the media industry.

Globally journalism is facing significant transformations. These transformations in journalism studies and understanding how journalism educators, students, and journalists accept innovation in their field are a big challenge these days. The industry of journalism is evolving and at a critical moment worldwide. Journalists must recognize that their old studies do not fit into the new digitalized and mobile media unless equipped with a sound



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theoretical knowledge bank (Blom, R., & Davenport, L. D. 2012, Frith, S., & Meech, P. 2007).

A good journalist knows how and where to get good stories from reliable sources and backgrounds. The media person must provide accurate, factual, truthful information fairly and objectively. Professional qualities can only be acquired with enthusiasm towards the career, and it can only be possible if the person is flexible to the level of adjustment with emerging trends in this field. Building relationships, seeing the bigger picture, digging out from the collected information, strong writing skills and honesty are the few characteristics that make a journalist fix in journalism. Basically, an all-rounder is the highlighted demand in the field of journalism (Hoffman, J 1983).

There is a vast difference between traditional journalism and technological journalism. The discordance between practice and theory is a focus these days and is being debated in both journalism schools and the media market. Future journalists need to be trained in multiple aspects of technology for successful survival. The journalism field constantly demands new skills that catch up to the industry (Coleman, R. R. M., & Fisherkeller, J. 2003). The journalism and mass communication programs do not combine theory and practice, a need of today's educators. There is a conflict between journalism practitioners and journalism professors in teaching students about what they see as a trade best learned in its practice (Schmitz Weiss, A. et al. 2020).

There is a contradiction between media literacy and media education; the broader view in the media industry is that media have to become intertwined with practitioners and educators. Exposure to the



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current challenging system increases awareness and provides a model explaining the techniques of media centers (Schmitz Weiss, A.et.al. 2020),(Rampal, K. R. 2009).

The world of journalism never stops moving. Certainly, the global economy and digital technology have profoundly impacted the media industry. The role of the journalism educator is not finished with teaching the theory to the students but producing the journalists who are the classic watchdogs. The doctrine of journalism education is to fulfill the standards of public service, tending to work for a highly useful society (Russell, C., & Eccles, S. 2018).

The future of journalism and media education has always remained a hot debate among the journalists' community. Current journalism's evolution and growth over time indicate that a big change is needed for time and the market at large. The future directions are too different from the previously conceptualized university journalism programs. It is often repeated that the courses for the new century journalism students are not specifically designed to train them for the digital field but to make them true professionals who can single-handedly manage multiple tasks. This fact is not welcomed by practitioners engaged with practical journalism for decades, leading to polarized thinking between academia and the media industry (Mensing, D. 2010).

Digital Era is the term used to describe today's digital technologies such as computers, laptops, gadgets and smartphones. The digital revolution revolutionized work practices in the late 90s with the Internet and mobile devices, social networking, big data, and computing clouds. We live in the information world where person-to-person is connected with the network



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and digital communication (Hardin, M. C., & Pompper, D. 2004). The Digital Era is the development of an evolutionary system in which knowledge turnover is increasingly out of the control of humans, making it a time in which our lives become more difficult to manage. Every age group is using social media for all purposes. Either it's for getting information, checking the news, buying online items, seek knowledge. Even reading books has shifted to the screens (Lane, A. B., & Johnston, K. A. 2017).

Historically as any new field is introduced and students are allowed to get an education in it, the curriculum is designed according to the current situations and emerging challenges of the field. The blackboards have turned white, and now the projectors and digital boards are used to give lectures in schools, colleges and universities classrooms. Similarly, trends in the media market are also being replaced, but on the other hand, the curriculum in the journalism departments does not get any updated input for multiple reasons, among which the dominant is the traditional approach by the people with the helm of affairs (Du, Y. R., & Thornburg, R. 2011), (Ilyas, A. 2019).

Figure 1 show media/journalism education; three mediums in conventional media are print media, radio and electronic media. Globalization requires the media practitioners to work in all the mediums single handedly, which is the need of today. The new media/social media is the best example of this, how a journalist can be a producer, broadcaster, reporter, editor and a public relation officer at the same time.

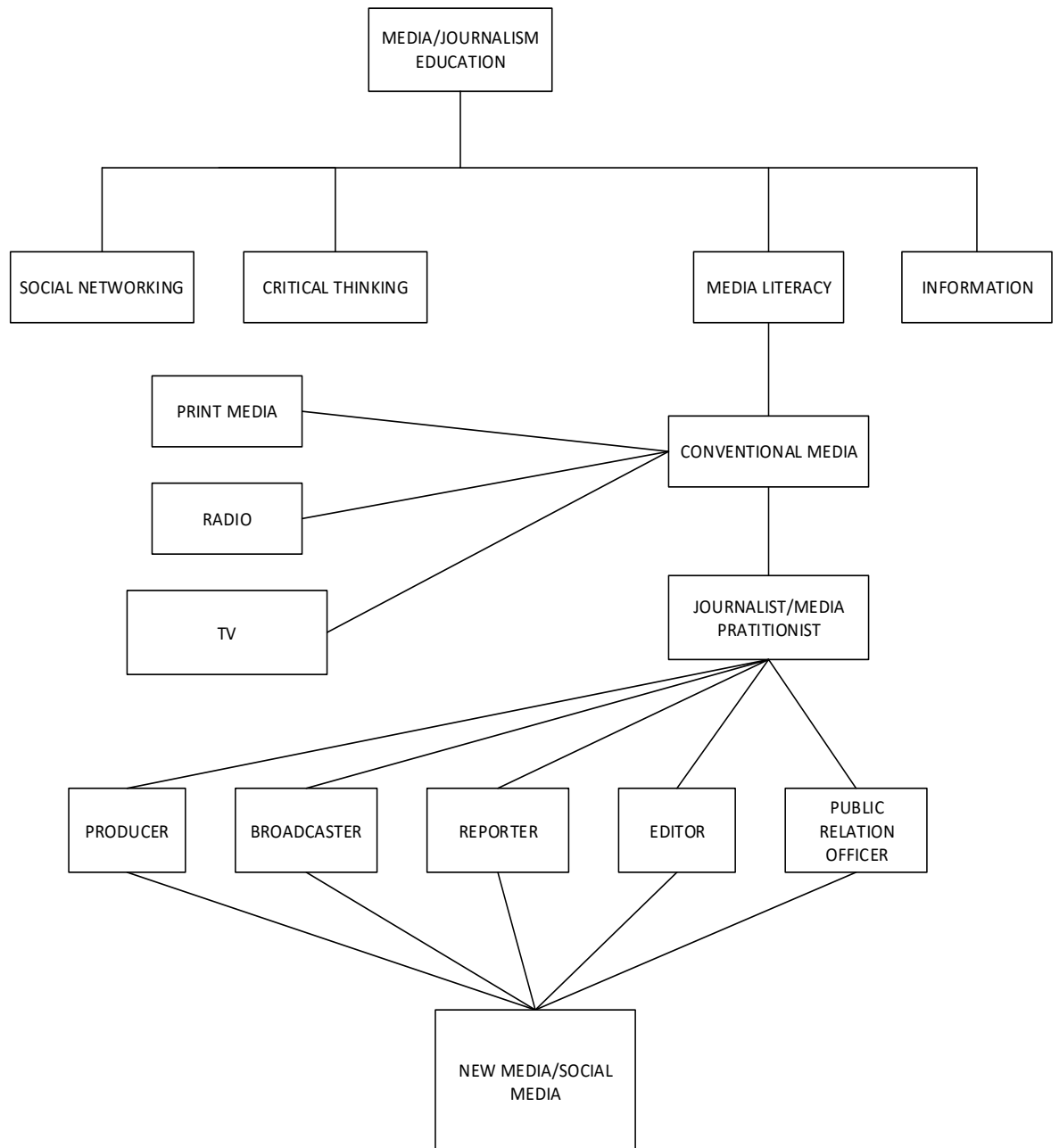


Figure 1: Generations of Journalism



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

6. Literature Review

7. Media studies are complex; it cuts across the curriculum in a disciplinary way. The students should be taught to think critically and understand the nature of mass media, especially the techniques used by practitioners in the field. More specifically, it aims to train the students to understand and enjoy the media work, organize, and construct reality. The rapid adoption of digital networks and new information and communication technologies substantially modifies media forms. This is reflected in new approaches to media education as it moves beyond the critical analysis and practices related to radio, television, film and pop culture to the critical reception and uses of ICT (Information in Computer and Technology) such as mobile devices, the Internet,



video games, social networks, WebTV, interactive digital boards, virtual worlds, and so on (Ilyas, A. 2019).

8. The old and new media studies both are the demand of new generation in which they can compete in the world. The new dimensions on the media studies have to be implemented in the departments of journalism and media communication for the broader spectrum concerns (Christ, W. G., & Potter, W. J. 1998). Functional and practical updated studies are needed to clear the concepts of students to perform all media necessary activities for the effective outcome results in new digital era (Whitney, D. C., & Ettema, J. S. 2003).

According to (Ahao, X. 1992), the media courses in universities do not match the toughness of the field. It is difficult for news organizations to hire young graduates and first teach them the basics of journalism and news writing. Nowadays, a journalist has to work in an agitated situation, and the time to make and analyze a news story is short. To become a successful journalist, fresh graduates have to struggle with an armory of expertise. Researchers in (Murphy, K. 2015) state that globally the change in journalism is accepted, and it is now time to understand how the institutions teach the students to advance their studies. Innovation is sometimes crucial in a continuing system. The genre of journalism is vast, and academics and journalists are exploring ways to educate students with new and changed journalism studies. Based on this argument, the situation in the universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – Pakistan



regarding the curriculum needs a thorough investigation vis-a-vis the demands of the media market.

The lack of consistency between journalism education and practice creates problems for fresh graduates. The focus in journalism schools is still on traditional journalism; however, the journalism world has turned ultra-modern. Future requires well-versed multi-trained journalists rather than specializing in a single field of journalism. Technology has an important role, every system in the organization has been digitalized, and the graduates walking in for the interview had to be a one-person army. The teaching skills and concepts need to catch up with the demands of the industry. The curriculum needs gradation, including online components and digitalization. This is why the current study is being carried out to find reasons behind the gap and reasons for resisting changes in the curriculum (Anderson, C. W. 2014).

Over the last two decades several countries are putting an effort to develop national curriculum. The phenomenon is very complex in journalism literacy as the new emerging techniques in media needs changes in several areas. In 1992, a summit was held by the media interested scholars, National Leadership Conference in which they discussed that “media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms” and they can send or receive messages through all types of mediums. (David Manning White, 1950) (Madison, E. 2014) gave his idea that a journalist works as a gatekeeper and (Warren Breed, 1955) says a journalist is a socialized person who has to keep an eye on every news. Now both the scholars have given their idea which means a journalist should be having a sense of digging out a story, make it catchy



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for his/her readers and most importantly keeping in view the rules and policies of the organization working with.

The challenges of the digital era are to produce a content which is professionally acceptable. This shows how students and educators are taking the journalism in this modern age. A student graduating as a journalist should have the ability which fits best in the big expanding market of digitalized media. It is only possible if the student has experienced the practical work through apprentice-style programs. The journalism and mass communication schools limiting the practicums in training media students will lack behind. The relationship in theory and practice is directly related in every field to enhance the ability of a learner. The scholars since forever trying to bridge the theory-practice gap to enhance the engagements between academics and media personals. It is a long term practice which is beneficial for the new upcoming journalists. This is the only recommendation by the scholars to be adopted by all the institutions and media academies (William and marry, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

There has been a wide gap between course content taught in the department of communication and media studies at various universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Currently, 8 out of 32 public sector universities in the province offer degrees in the discipline, while the media market is also expanding every day. The media industry needs a professionally sound and technically skilled workforce, which they usually do not get out of the graduated lot. The reason is that the academia and media industry are functioning in two parallel but different directions. Both have their problems



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of understanding and accommodating each other. Consequently, both have lost trust in each other, and this trust deficit frustrates academia, the media market and graduates of journalism departments of the province as ultimate sufferers. The problem is that no serious attempt has been witnessed to minimize the gap; instead, attempts are made to widen it by not listening to each other.

Research Questions

Why is there a gap between journalism curriculum and practical journalism?

- a. What challenges are faced by media industry while appointing professionally trained journalists?
- b. Why does not academia make their course content in accordance with the needs of media industry?

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate reasons behind the widening gap between curriculum of the journalism departments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – Pakistan
- To analyze the motives behind different methodologies approaches of the academia and media industry for dealing the same issue.
- To determine ways and means that can bridge this gap

Methodology

This research is mainly focused on identifying existing gaps. The academicians involved in teaching the media and mass communication curriculum and the various types of journalists working in the field have been interviewed through the structured interview technique. For this



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purpose, two detailed questionnaires were developed (one for academicians and the other for field journalists). Both questionnaires contained thirteen questions each, attached as Annexure 1 and Annexure 2, respectively. The questionnaire was distributed among 40 academicians and 40 journalists; among those, 31 academicians and 28 journalists responded.

These groups were further divided into three clusters according to their field of expertise and age groups. Their detailed responses were noted, and a discussion of their point of view is described in the below sections. The data has been coded in the tables along with the respondents' demographic details, then interpreted and authenticated by experts in the respective fields.

Table 1 : Profile of Respondents					
		Educationist (31/40)	In %	Journalists (28/40)	In %
Gender	Male	23	74%	17	61%
	Female	8	26%	11	39%
Age	28-42	15	48%	20	71%
	43-55	16	52%	08	29%
Education	BS	07	23%	23	82%
	MS	24	77%	05	18%
Professional/ Journalism Experience (in year)	1-5	06	19%	07	25%
	6-9	09	29%	13	46%
	10+	16	51%	08	29%

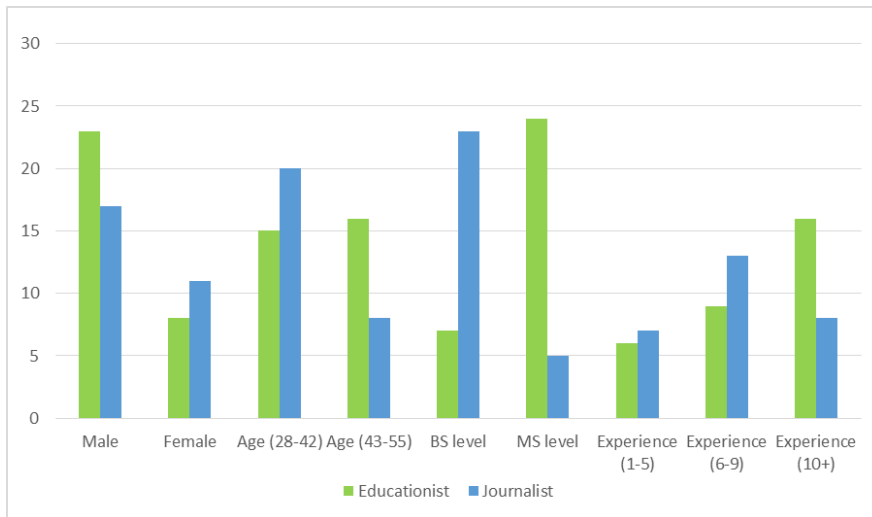


Figure 2: Graphical Analysis of the Survey Respondents

Table 1 and Figure 2 shows a detailed analytical overview of the profile of respondents in the case of a survey conducted for the current research. A total of 80 questionnaires, out of which half of them were educationists, whereas the rest were field journalists. In the case of the education sector, 31 persons responded, of which 23 male faculty and eight female faculty responded. In contrast, in the case of field journalists, 28 persons responded, of which 17 were male, and 11 were female. The data showed that most of the respondents were male, and 48 % in the case of educationists and 71% in the case of journalists were lying in the bracket of 28-42 years. The remaining respondents were in the category of 43-55 years of age.

As far as the education level of concerned respondents is undertaken. It was found that most of the teaching faculty was MS qualified, 77%, and most journalists were BS qualified, 82%. The analytics show that the field



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workers are less motivated towards higher education, whereas a teaching faculty is more oriented to achieve higher education.

In terms of the respondents' professional experiences, it was analyzed that in both cases, the more experienced professionals showed seriousness towards responding to an issue in which the gap between media studies and its practical implication is concerned to be considerably addressed.

Scaling of the Survey:

- 0 - 1 Corresponds to 20%
- 1.1-2 corresponds to 40%
- 2.1-3 corresponds to 60%
- 3.1-4 corresponds to 80%
- 4.1-5 corresponds to 100%

Table 2 contains those five questions which were common in both the surveys of educationists and journalists. The gap is clearly defined in the first question, where the field journalist and educationist both agree that a wide gap exists between the media students and field practitioners. There must be a close liaison between the two professionals so that the students graduating from the departments must be aware of the challenges present in the practical field and the modern technology being encountered. The gap needs to be filled with efforts from both sides, and sufficient workshops and training on the present-day requirement in terms of new mediums is the need of the day.



S.No	Questions	On Scale of 1-5	
		Educationists	Journalists
1.	Is there a gap between the media education and practice?	4.8	3.2
2.	Should there be a formal liaison between media practitioners and academicians?	4.8	4.3
3.	Any individual effort to fill the gap?	2.7	1.5
4.	Are the workshops and trainings helpful to bridge the gap?	4.9	3.8
5.	Are new mediums requirements as a need of the day?	4.9	4.1

Results and Discussions

Summary of Journalists interviews

The main highlighted point of the survey lies in the fact that there is a gap between theoretical media studies and practical fieldwork. The theories being taught are essential but must be taught in application to the practical field. Revision of the current curriculum is strongly needed to be at par with the changing digital-oriented journalism.

Most of the journalists for this survey believed that there should be close interaction of teaching faculty with the field journalist so that the challenges being faced in the field can be oriented to the undergraduate students. Most of the students are unaware of media ethics and loss. Practical knowledge is dependent on new and updated syllabi and regular internship programs. Female students should be given priority as the field



needs more female journalists. Motivational lectures on a regular basis are highly fruitful, and practitioners from diverse fields will prove to be a valuable addition.

Many journalists agreed on the fact that media training and workshops should be held regularly. Educationalists should also be invited so that a close liaison be established. This training should not only highlight the field issues and hurdles but also share knowledge about reporting the challenging areas.

The survey on the transformation of print/electronic media to digitalization shared their views that social media has taken the world by storm; However, no authenticity of the majority of the news is there, and media has lost the power to differentiate between real and fake news. Journalists are earning more on online platforms, but the flavour of truthfulness (of news) has been compromised. There is a strong need for training of News Anchor and News Reporters.

Another vital parameter touched is that the students coming into the market have the motto of getting degrees rather than learning. Journalism without having in-depth practical knowledge is useless. Media challenges faced by practitioners are never covered thoroughly in the curriculum, while reporters in the field often make hard decisions while reporting on critical scenarios. These include political pressures, censorship, life threat, job insecurities, conflict/diplomatic reporting and many more. A classroom student is usually unaware of all these hardships. They are never taught to be bound to read a newspaper daily.



The key to being a good journalist is having a bird's eye view of every news. Apart from practical knowledge, ethics like honesty, morality, source confidentiality etc. are to be taught to graduating students. The power of writing is strongly recommended, as today's students often lack it. Good reading leads to good writing skills; similarly, good observation leads to healthy journalism.

Summary of Academicians Interviews

As per academicians, a significant gap exists between the academic courses and the practical applications faced in the field, but no one has ever tried to minimize it. The taught courses are primarily theoretical and are not according to the present media challenges. Theories, norms and media ethics taught in the books are different in the practical field.

Media organizations for internship demand students who are not addressed in undergraduate programs. The new media studies curriculum needs to be thoroughly revised because technology and the internet have drastically changed media.

Formal liaison between the academicians and journalists is essential as very few people are working in both fields simultaneously. Field workers should be a part of the curriculum development in universities to bridge the gap. The essential thing is the implications of modern technology in course designs based on the skills required in industry and field. New trends and challenges sharing will also be the value-added approach.



Being academicians, many interviewees were optimistic regarding technical workshops and seminars. They were also of the point that various motivational lecturers should be invited on a regular basis to give hands-on skills to the students. Teachers' training is also necessary for their capacity building. The concept of one person show is diminishing; the world is shifting to decentralization, and possible only if you take a keen interest in these workshops and seminars. Educational visits to media industries can always be helpful. Seminars should be a part of the course curriculum as a core subject. Courses related to multimedia education and specialization in broadcast journalism need to be introduced.

A major drawback that the faculty identified was that the courses taught in university are merely designed by teachers with no experience of field challenges. Minor contents like media ethics, conducting norms of an interview, drafting a balanced storyline etc. can be pretty helpful in grooming their journalistic characteristics.

A good journalist, PRO (Public Relations Officer), media specialist, communication officer etc. cannot only be built by only bookish knowledge. Only a few courses are taught according to market demand, but mostly the subjects are old and outdated. As per the level of advancement in media studies, revision in the courses is mandatory once a year. It should not be more than once because the teachers may also be given a flexible time period to have command over a new curriculum. The theoretical studies taught in the courses are associated with the fieldwork, but still, they rely on the teaching skills of the faculty member that how he/she relates them to the practical field. The new technologies needed are podcasting, streaming and stream yard with their practical skills.



We are moving towards a digital world that can fulfil the present media education needs. We also need to equip our practitioners according to digital skills requirements. Due to the technology world becoming a global village while we are still in the traditional market, we need ultimate Digital systems, Digital skills and technology revolution. New subjects like MOJO are spreading their wings throughout the market and replacing older journalism technologies. They exist, but the students should also be taught newer techniques and traditional journalism trends. Ticker writing skills should be taught to our students. Editing software being taught is too old, and new software must be introduced in the curriculum. As it is an era of digital marketing, we must come up with those subjects which are more online-oriented. Specialized degrees should be offered, like BS in broadcast media, BS in multimedia journalism etc. just a two-semester specialization is not enough.

Conclusion

9. This research encompasses a significant concern in the education sector in which the university-taught courses are drifting away from their practical field applications. The authors have tried to select one field of academics, media and mass communication to identify if there is a gap between the offered courses and the practical field. A group of people was surveyed, and their interviews were noted. Most interviewees believed this gap could only be reduced if there was a close liaison between the academicians and the field journalists. Practical courses related to the field need to be included in the curriculum, regular seminars and workshops are



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conducted, and modern tools of journalism, primarily digital-oriented subjects and social media norms, need to be included. Authentication, morality and truthfulness should be a significant part of the field experience in the current era of social media as it had been in the past ages of print and electronic media. Students' level of interest should be maintained by giving them exposure to the field irrespective of peace, conflict, or diplomatic reporting.

Recommendations

- The education provided in the media schools is still far away from what is happening in the practical field. Journalism program administrators should help develop the appropriate curriculum for preparing their students to work in the practical field.
- The curriculum of media education must be designed in a way that could help to train students in a manner to be prepared for a complex society.
- Journalism schools need to update their curriculum to train new journalists to survive the pressure in the field and work efficiently and effectively.
- The existing institutions have to rebuild the module already taught and delivered. The present crisis and difficulties fresh graduates face is the model that journalism education is becoming an industry-centered model.
- Teaching journalism and practicing journalists need to experiment with new conjunction as an intellectual, which creates an opening for the new era of media studies.

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