

From Depth to Clicks: The Opportunity Cost and Dilemma in Investigative Journalism: A short review

Abhirup Bhadra

Doctoral Research scholar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, ARKA JAIN University, Jamshedpur

Abstract

Opportunity cost is a fundamental concept of economics which plays a vital role in the field of media. Particularly in journalism the real time news production which can have misinformation, less scrutiny and shallow research- in the new media era, the cost of investigative journalism is paid off as it requires time, finance and patience to come up with an investigative report. This paper is a short review of how news media are paying the opportunity cost against investigative journalism in order to sustain the news business and producing real time news rather investing on in depth news production.

Keywords: Opportunity cost, media economics, journalism, decision-making

Introduction

Derived from microeconomics theory opportunity cost is the value lost in accepting best alternatives against other alternatives. In everyday task we try to choose the best alternative for a task paying a value of other possible alternatives where choices are possibly limited. Assuming the best choice is made, it is the "cost" incurred by not enjoying the *benefit* that would have been had if the second-best available choice had been taken instead. Decision makers have conflicting priorities set when allocating their resources: time, money, and above all, attention. Here, opportunity cost-the value of the next best alternative forgone-theory comes into play. Be it whether a newsroom should spend time on investigative journalism rather than on click baiting or how streaming platforms should invest scarce resources in original productions rather than licensing third-party films; the consideration of opportunity costs very deeply shapes media strategies and their outcomes.

Behavioural Aspects of Evaluation of Opportunity Cost

Availability cost is rarely considered either by organizations or individuals in the practical aspect, though opportunity cost has strong theoretical importance in decision-making. Consumers were stated to rarely inquire on opportunity costs unless lay viewed constraints in Spiller (2011), making it feel like the vast tendency to obliterate the assessment of such costs in routine decisions. Such oversight would result in many missed opportunities, as the benefits provided by alternative options will go completely unexamined. Investigate opportunity cost usage in decision making: Neumann and Friedman (1978; 1980). Decision makers ignore or underweight the opportunity cost, this usually ends up in a misallocation of resources, not fully considering potential benefits from alternative options.

Strategic Consequences for Media Organizations

For media organizations, opportunity cost consideration becomes essential for strategic planning with regard to optimizing resources. By considering the potential benefits of alternative investments in a systematic way, companies can comprise somewhat informed decisions based not only on their long-term objectives but also on the current standing of the organization in the market. In doing so, it allows for greater operational efficiencies and innovations that are made in an organization that would otherwise not be absorbed into a traditional industry view, as it is changing rapidly.

Adopting and adapting opportunity cost will go a very long way in the institution for media organizations. It is beyond the nuts and bolts of resource allocation and strategic decision-making. What it will help one realize is that there are potential benefits from other choices. Consequently, a more pragmatic way of getting through media complexities can be discovered for the company so that it can enjoy continued growth and competitiveness.

Opportunity Cost in Media Resource Allocation

Opportunity cost serves as a cornerstone principle for any media organization in its strategies-deserving-costs-benefits dichotomy in resource allocation and opportunity cost. This principle obliges them to estimate not only the explicit costs arising from a decision but also the implicit benefits that have been sacrificed due to eliminating alternatives. This perspective is useful, especially during resource allocation, to ensure that the selected strategies align with long-term objectives of the organization.

Levinthal and Wu (2022) highlight opportunity cost in linking resource allocation and corporate strategy, especially for diversified firms. As the authors indicate, informed decision-making requires an understanding of the next best use of the firm-specific resources, which is often a choice within the organization itself. This internal focus, as a result, helps media companies to navigate through the complexities associated with the distribution of their resources across various departments and projects as a whole, thus getting the maximum overall performance.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs a qualitative approach based on economic and communication theories:

Media Economics Theory (Doyle, 2013)- It provides explanations about how financial constraints were seen in profits, and how that influenced media decision-making. "Understanding Media Economics" written by Gillian Doyle in 2013, offers insight into how these financial constraints would force profit motives into decision making in media organizations. They operate under high fixed costs and thus very low marginal costs, which create an institutional imperative that makes firms want to maximize audience reach. They tend to benefit from or gain economies of scale and scope by distributing content over larger audiences and multiple platforms.

Market structures such as media concentration and barriers to entry that normally exist along a continuum between pure competition and pure monopoly influence competition, often producing consolidation in an industry. The main dimensions of the change from which its new business models will ultimately emerge are digitization and convergence, opening the way to multi-platform distribution and network effects.

They seem to be adopting diversification, vertical integration, and new innovative business models (like subscriptions and ad-supported content) to overcome these financial hurdles. According to Doyle, media policies such as ownership regulations and support for public service media will ensure content diversity and representation in the public interest.

Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)- according to the agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972): how certain issues in the media are prioritized while others are ignored. According to Dearing & Rogers (1996), opportunity costs shape editorial decisions because news organizations must select stories because of space, time, and/or resource limitations.

The theory says media do not tell people what to think but what to think about (McCombs, 2004). Political bias, corporate ownership, audience preferences and so on are all factors in agenda-setting (Entman, 2007). While traditional media still have heft in the balance, social media has shaken that monopoly with algorithm-selected news (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012).

In an age of false information, editorial gatekeeping remains crucial in creating public understanding of issues such as politics, climate change, and global crises (Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Tandoc et al., 2018). These dynamics of agenda setting enable a better understanding of how media shapes a given society's perspective.

Opportunity Cost for investigative journalism, its impact and overview

Investigative journalism requires significant resources but serves public interest, whereas sensationalist content is cheaper and drives quick engagement. The opportunity cost of prioritizing sensationalism is the loss of in-depth reporting that holds power accountable.

Investigative journalism is one of the best practices within the field to report facts and serve public interest, but comes with a lot of responsible reporting as well, where as in other hand sensationalist reporting is quick and can drive more user engagement. The cost paid against investigative journalism against sensationalist journalism often leads to misinformation and rumours but because of its nature the user engagement is much higher than reports based on investigative journalism which is considered to be more authentic and accountable. Many news organisations have applied paywall model over open access to their content to sustain the business which in return limits information dissemination to a large section of readers impacting public opinion or discourse.

Reporting facts in its true manner is an art and requires time and patience to get deep into the matter and finally conclude. It also requires highly specialized resource person to carry out the job which brings in the finance aspect as well. A investigative report may not get ready instantly rather it takes a lot a time to understand the matter, dive deep into past and present discourses, thus unlike the quick news reading culture that has developed because of the new media and converging news media technology where news items are served on a rapid and real time basis and engages more users, we tend to pay the its cost in terms of authenticity, true information and accountability.

In the present era of news consumption, the role of citizen journalism is gaining much popularity as because of the democratic accessibility of mobile technology and internet access. Journalist requires proper training and experience for years to get them fit into the realm of investigative journalism as it requires high sense of subject matter knowledge and precision, which may not be there in case of reports generated by citizen journalist.

The new media journalism practices where the demand of instant news updates have altered the context of journalism and news consumption to a large extent. The opportunity cost in prioritizing speed comes with the cost of in-depth investigative journalism which requires time, resource and rigorous fact checking (Hamilton, 2016).

Investigative journalism requires deep research, cross verification from multiple resources, field visits and time to come up with the report, but the breaking of news culture and prioritizing real time quick news

updates have superimposed the investigative journalism practices (Tandoc, 2014). This resulted in lack of funds allocated to the practice, giving less importance to these practices over quick publishable news, where investigative journalism has the potential to uncover truth at a larger extent (Waisbord, 2020).

Traditional investigative journalism, while adhering to strict standards for fact-checking, often witnesses superimposition in the direction of quick news, causing the reporting of false information based on unverified sources with sensationalism (Carlson, 2009). Exceedingly, the pressure puts most first-published-materials on a quick note, making follow-up corrections few and far between to erase the initial impact of misinformation (Vos & Thomas, 2019).

With advertisement revenue declining for many traditional mass media outlets, funds cut from investigative teams are instead spent on real-time reporting and digital dissemination (Pickard, 2020). News organizations, especially those relying on click-based revenue models, consider content that has instant audience involvement more important than investigative lengthy stories.

Conclusion

It is essential today to have efficient reporting in the era of misinformation. Real-time reporting is taken as one of the essences in news media industry today. The necessary resources such as time, money, and editorial commitment are, by virtue of investigative journalism, less likely to be made available in most newsrooms today, owing to such resources costing too much at a time that revenue models are focused on clicks and viral stories in social media.

For instance, it creates an incredible impact on the readers as well. Quick news prefers surface level updates instead of deep and complex thinking, reducing a great deal to misinformation or end up being an incomplete narrative. Investigative journalism uncovers systematic errors in news production methods, corporate malpractices or human rights abuses. To be replaced by such content that generates excitement for the present without thinking of long effects into society, established for immediately generating public engagement rather than long-term societal impact. The decline of in-depth reporting means that powerful institutions that is the news industry face less scrutiny, leading to an uninformed or misinformed public that lacks the necessary context to hold authorities accountable.

Ethical considerations are associated with such evolution. The race for getting first leads to compromising the values of journalism. After all this following correction, it is most likely that the initial, and often flawed, narrative tends to dominate. This situation does contrast with investigative journalism which relies on the facts and critical analysis, as that provides a better ground for discourse in the public arena and for the change of policy.

To counter such a negative impact, the news organization has to rework its priorities in the light of demands brought upon it by journalism-accuracy, depth, and accountability. Sustainable funding models, renewed commitments from media editors, and raising audience engagement strategies that value quality over quantity can help revitalize investigative journalism. Such, it will be the case that the investigative reporter can survive, not because of the sustenance by the media, but by the need of an entire society- such that journalism is not merely a platform through which information flows but a guardian of truth having power to inform and shape the public opinion in a positive way.

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