



## **Conflict and Social Media Integration in Local News Gathering: A Study of Journalist Perceptions in Oman**

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### **Abstract**

Social media integration has transformed news gathering. This study explores the perceptions of journalists in Oman regarding the opportunities and challenges associated with utilizing social media in their newsroom operations. Through semi-structured interviews with journalists from the country's only television station that produces news—Oman TV—this study provides comprehensive insight into the current perspectives and challenges related to social media integration into Oman's news industry, especially in reporting local conflict events. The findings reveal that while journalists acknowledge the importance of social media as a valuable resource for story generation, they face challenges such as the absence of clear editorial guidelines, concerns regarding information credibility, and the need to conduct time-consuming verification processes. The results underscore the necessity of adapting to the evolving landscape of journalism by developing systematic approaches to handle user-generated content (UGC) and investing in training programs to enhance the skills of journalists to better navigate social media platforms effectively.

### **Introduction**

The proliferation of social media has facilitated audience engagement in public affairs which has enabled content creation, and opinion sharing. These social networks have become invaluable resources for journalists as an easily accessible outlet to disseminate news and information. More specifically, newsroom operations (i.e. news gathering and news production) have been streamlined for journalists by providing the capacity to access real-time updates on current events and local conflicts through the active monitoring of posts, blogs, and other social media contributions (Li et al. 2022). As such, the advent of social media has transformed the traditional news gathering process. Previously, journalists had to conduct time-consuming and often laborious field research to collect information. However, now they receive news and information updates directly to their

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mobile devices without ever leaving the newsroom. This shift presents both advantages and challenges as news stories can propagate rapidly on social platforms from the moment they are assigned. In contemporary newsrooms, editors now require journalists to consider existing public information and uncover novel aspects of stories that have not yet been addressed (Ivask and Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt 2024).

The rapid proliferation of digital technology, which has facilitated the global growth of social media, has forced news editors to adapt their information-gathering methods to keep pace with evolving news production processes (Anter 2023). As a result of these changes, social media serves not only as a news source, but also as a new reporting platform that enables interactive journalism (Kurt 2014). This allows the audience to actively participate in news creation. However, the utilization of social media presents challenges to traditional journalistic practices. More specifically, the information obtained from these platforms may potentially be unreliable. As such, journalists must verify the credibility of the information prior to news dissemination. Maintaining credibility and objectivity within published news is a fundamental principle in journalism (Schmidt 2023). However, verification processes are more difficult due to social media accounts frequently employing anonymous pseudonyms. This makes it difficult for journalists to ascertain the identity of those posting information and to evaluate the reliability of shared content (Bhat 2023; Buyens, Van Aelst, and Paulussen 2024). Journalists can face even greater difficulties when dealing with information posted on social media about conflict issues, particularly those facing society, because these issues arouse public interest and relate to everyday life.

This study investigates the opportunities and challenges associated with integrating social media into newsroom operations as perceived by professional journalists in Oman. As part of this, the study seeks to explore perceptions of the use of social media in news production related to local conflict issues in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly issues of layoffs, job seekers, community feedback on government services, and popular demands. The significance of this study extends beyond national boundaries by contributing to a broader understanding of social media integration in comparable media organizations throughout the Arab world due to the dearth of research on this topic.

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### *The Gatekeeping theory and transformations in the era of social media*

Gatekeeping theory is a prominent framework that elucidates the role of journalists and media organizations in regulating the dissemination of news to the public. Traditionally, this theory emphasizes the role of editors



and news producers in selecting and editing news prior to publication. Journalists and media organizations have historically served as the primary "gatekeepers," determining what is disseminated to the public based on editorial, political, and professional criteria. However, the emergence of social media has significantly altered this process, presenting new challenges for traditional gatekeepers (Salonen and Laaksonen 2023; Scheffauer, Gil De Zúñiga, and Goyanes 2023).

In the context of journalists' use of social media, journalists are no longer the sole purveyors of news; rather, individuals can now publish news and information directly, thereby somewhat diminishing the role of traditional media organizations as gatekeepers. Social media platforms present journalists with the challenge of managing a vast influx of information from diverse sources, some of which are official and others unreliable (Christensen and Khalil 2021). Nonetheless, social networks have not entirely eliminated the role of gatekeepers. Instead, they have redefined it, with journalists assuming the role of "curators" rather than traditional gatekeepers, tasked with filtering, verifying, and presenting news in more authoritative contexts. Consequently, gatekeeping theory remains pertinent in digital journalism, having evolved into a more intricate process that involves engaging with news rather than merely controlling or obstructing its publication (Vos and Russell 2019).

#### *Social media effects on News Production stages*

Social media has significantly influenced the key stages of newsroom operations, which include information gathering, story selection, fact-checking, visual content support, and dissemination. The initial phases of news collection have been inexorably altered by social media, which involves the methods that journalists use to seek out and select information. The changes in techniques are due to reporters increasingly relying on social platforms as sources of information (Newman, Dutton, and Blank 2013). As such, the rise of social media has led to shifts in conventional journalistic methods owing to evolving patterns of information exchange and communication (Botan 2024). Unlike traditional reporting, journalists can now monitor events from the comfort of their newsrooms via social media updates, which conserves time and resources. Knight and Stewart (2022) note that acquiring information has become significantly faster as it often takes just minutes, instead of painstaking field work which may take days. Consequently, the use of social media facilitates the collection of more extensive and potentially higher-quality content within a shorter timeframe.

However, verifying content from social media presents a significant challenge for journalists because information can originate from anonymous or unreliable sources. Therefore, the verification process is crucial for



journalists and media outlets as it ensures credibility and accuracy. An effective process to verify social media content initially stems from the knowledge and experience that comes from extensively using this novel technology. This expertise contributes to the development of a cumulative user experience that distinguishes between known and unknown sources (Buttry 2014). Brandtzaeg et al. (2015) identify five aspects of social media information verification. The first is trusted sources, which includes national and international news agencies, news providers, celebrities, politicians, and verified accounts. The second is access to eyewitnesses and authenticating sources, which is achieved by examining profile pages and understanding the account's general orientation. The third is traditional journalistic methods, such as contacting eye witnesses to confirm information. The fourth is multimodal verification and verification tools, such as online software that may be used to locate the original sources of images and video clips. The final is an editor's experience and knowledge. These findings align with another study by Shapiro et al. (2013), which revealed that journalists in the digital journalism era employed verification methods similar to those used in traditional journalism to achieve credibility. These methods include source verification, basic data analysis, official document analysis, and common observations among news editors (Kligler-Vilenchik 2021).

However, the drastic changes are not limited to text as social media influences the visual aspects of newsroom operations as well. Journalists and editors occasionally incorporate videos from social media platforms, which can include captured footage from eyewitnesses who were present at an event (Murrell 2017). Given the time-consuming nature of verification, Murrell (2017) observed that some news outlets deliberately utilize user-generated content (UGC)—such as YouTube videos—while providing source information, affiliation, dates, and occasionally links to the original content. In addition, numerous news channels now display a user's tweets and posts during broadcasting to offer additional accreditation and substantiation.

The influence of social media on news production has extended to the Arab world, which mirror the trends in Western countries. Numerous Arab television channels have begun to utilize social media for gathering information. As an example, several Arab and international channels relied heavily on social media content during their coverage of the Arab Spring in 2010. More recently, major television networks have significantly relied upon social media as an information source while covering crucial events, such as the Syrian civil war and other Arab Spring revolutions (Van Leuven, Deprez, and Heinrich 2013; Rohde et al. 2016). Yoedtadi, Ronda, and Wahid (2021) observed that Twitter became a key platform to facilitate direct interaction between the public and television stations, which



enhanced the ability of channels to obtain images and clips to substantiate news stories. This finding highlights one of the advantages of social networking sites (Yoedtadi, Ronda, and Wahid 2021). However, research conducted by Radcliffe and Lam (2018) revealed that in the Arab world trust in social media as a news source lagged behind traditional media.

### *Social Media as a News Source*

Most research on social media usage has concentrated on its role as an information source for journalists seeking current news. Kämpel (2020) noted that social media inadvertently became a tool for journalists to stay informed regarding recent events by examining the posts of other journalists. Meanwhile, a study involving 118 journalists from North America and the United Kingdom (UK) revealed that 35 percent of journalists regularly incorporated social media as an information source (Social Media Today 2015). Another survey in the United States (US) indicated that social media had become a primary news resource for journalists as approximately 84 percent of respondents stated they consult social media platforms—particularly Twitter (currently known as X)—to gather information for their stories (Bunz 2010). Nonetheless, journalists can use social media as a research tool to identify significant and timely events without relying on it as a source. To that end, Willnat and Weaver (2018) noted that social media allows journalists to observe details of people's lives, which can generate ideas for news stories. The integration of social media into everyday life has led journalists to regularly use it for updates on weather, traffic, and maintenance alerts.

The increasing presence of editorial policies in newsrooms that guide social media use by journalists is an indication of its growing influence in news production. Bossio (2017) defined editorial policies as a set of rules and guidelines to govern the incorporation of social media into newsroom operations. Research suggests these policies are often influenced by government regulations. Moreover, these policies dictate how newsroom staff handle social media sources, topics that can be derived from social media, applied news values when examining social media content, and a gatekeeper's approach to social media (Neuberger, Nuernbergk, and Langenohl 2018). According to Heravi and Harrower (2016), regulating the use of social media sources in journalism presents challenges because of its unreliability, which initiates a potential to disseminate rumors and misinformation.

### *Verifying Information from Citizens*

Verification is a fundamental aspect of professional journalistic practice, aimed at ensuring the accuracy of content prior to publication. In traditional journalism, verification processes involved multiple stages,



including source checking, data auditing, and editorial reviews. However, with the advent of social media, journalists encounter a new challenge: managing the rapid flow of information, which may be true, false, or misleading (Thomson, Angus, Dootson, Hurcombe, and Smith 2020). This has compelled media organizations to adopt a heightened level of responsibility in news verification (Zhang and Li 2019). Nevertheless, this approach has not entirely resolved the issue, as misinformation continues to spread rapidly, necessitating additional verification efforts by journalists. Furthermore, the integration of verification into journalism has redefined the roles of journalists in the digital environment, where they are now tasked not only with reporting news but also with countering disinformation and promoting digital awareness among the public. Consequently, journalists utilizing social media in their work must enhance their information-checking skills to protect the credibility of their media organizations and maintain public trust in news content. Thus, the relationship between verifying information and journalists' use of social networks is complementary, as the credibility of journalistic work in the digital environment relies on the effectiveness of verification techniques (Nölleke, Grimmer, and Horky 2016).

In this context, citizen journalism intersects with the theories of gatekeeping and information verification. Citizen journalism has, on the one hand, diminished the traditional role of gatekeepers, as the public is now able to bypass conventional media institutions in disseminating information. On the other hand, this phenomenon has underscored the importance of information verification, as it has become incumbent upon journalists to discern news from citizens and ensure its accuracy prior to republishing or adopting it as reliable sources (Cummings 2018). Consequently, the use of social media in journalism represents not only a competitive relationship but also a complementary one, wherein journalists can utilize content produced by citizens, albeit within stringent professional standards that ensure the validity and accuracy of information.

#### *Social media usage in Oman and the Arab region*

Research on the use of social media by Omani journalists is limited, as only one study was identified during this research. Al-Baloshi (2017) conducted a survey of 176 journalists from five Omani newspapers to examine their social media usage and its impact on their professional performance and journalistic practices. The findings revealed that Twitter (now X) was the most frequently used social media platform by journalists, particularly for gathering information on their articles. Although a significant advantage of social media is easy access to information and perspectives, this study also found that not all journalists and editors trust information from social media absent verification.



Other research on news production at Oman TV has been conducted by Al-Nofali (2014) and Al-Shibli (2017). These studies examined news sources and newsroom regulations but neglected to explore the use of social media by its journalists. Al Nofali's (2014) study revealed that Oman TV utilizes diverse news sources, which include the *Oman News Agency (ONA)*, Arab and international news agencies, local and external correspondents, officials, eyewitnesses, radio and television stations, and social media platforms. Al Shibli's (2017) findings corroborated this and further noted that Oman TV had established contractual agreements with international news agencies for text and visual content. The study identified the *ONA* and international agencies, such as *Reuters*, *France Press*, and the *Associated Press*, as Oman TV's primary news sources. Furthermore, the *News Centre of Oman TV* is affiliated with the Multimedia Exchange Network over Satellites of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (MENOS-ASBU), which is a news exchange network for Arab television stations. This affiliation facilitates access to a diverse range of reports and news stories (Al-Shibli 2017).

Research identified the social media platforms that were instrumental during uprisings in Arab nations, such as Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Radcliffe (2021) points out that Twitter is a primary platform for information sharing among citizens and journalists. "During the Arab Spring, journalists...used Twitter as a key conduit into what was happening on the ground" (Radcliffe 2021, 3). Ali and Fahmy (2013) noted that conventional media outlets, such as television channels, often sourced content from these social networks during the uprisings. Hamdy and Gomaa (2012) observed that Egyptian news media presented stories obtained from social media with human-interest values. Social media played a crucial role in information and news dissemination during the 2011 revolution in Egypt, both among the public and among journalists.

The researcher did not find studies that clarify the role of social media in covering local conflict events in the Sultanate of Oman. However, based on personal observations, social media is an effective element in the Sultanate for discussing local issues, especially those of a conflict nature, such as the issues of those laid off from work, job seekers, and comments on government services. For example, social media activists publish news about unjustified layoffs from companies, or criticize a particular government service, which leads the government agency to issue a comment or statement on the information circulating on social media. This indicates the role of these networks in raising local issues. The following are examples of official statements published by several government bodies, including clarifications on the issues raised on social media.



 <p><b>توضيح</b></p> <p>تابعت وزارة العمل ما نُشر في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي عن قيام شركة عُمان للمطربات بإخطار عدد من العاملين لديها بإنهاء خدماتهم بسبب ظروفها الاقتصادية.</p> <p>وجار العمل والتنسيق مع الشركة لعدم إنهاء خدمات القوى العاملة الوطنية وفق ما نصت عليه أحكام قانون العمل .</p> <p>www.mol.gov.om</p>	 <p><b>بيان توضيحي</b></p> <p>بالإشارة إلى ما يتم تداوله في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي عن حالة أحد المواطنين من سكان ولاية شناس، ومن منطلق حرص الوزارة على توفير الرعاية والحماية لفئة المسنين، وبعد موافقة المواطن فقد قامت الوزارة بنقله إلى دار الرعاية الاجتماعية، حيث سيتلقى الرعاية الصحية والاجتماعية بالدار.</p> <p>الجدير بالذكر أن المواطن هو حالة ضمانية وترعاه أسرة بديلة، وقد قامت دائرة التنمية الاجتماعية بالولاية المعنية سابقاً بمحاولة اقناعه للانتقال إلى دار الرعاية الاجتماعية لتلقي الرعاية الصحية والمعيشية بها، ولكنه رفض ذلك.</p> <p>تقبل الله صيامكم وقيامكم وكل عام وانتم بخير.</p> <p>www.mosd.gov.om</p> <p>@MOSD_Page Ministry of Social Development mosd.oman</p>
<p><b>Translation (by author):</b> The Ministry of Labor has followed up on social media posts about Oman Refreshments Company notifying a number of its employees of the termination of their services due to its economic circumstances. We are working and coordinating with the company to ensure that the services of the national workforce are not terminated, in accordance with the provisions of the Labor Law.</p>	<p><b>Translation (by author):</b> In reference to what has been circulating on social media about the condition of a citizen residing in the Wilayat of Shinas, and based on the commitment from the Ministry of Social Development to providing care and protection for the elderly, and with the citizen's approval, the Ministry has transferred him to a social care home where he will receive health and social care.</p>

Figure 1: Statements from a number of government bodies in the Sultanate of Oman regarding issues raised on social media.

## Objectives and Research Questions

This study examines the use of social media in journalism and newsroom operations in the Sultanate of Oman, specifically within mainstream media. Consequently, the research objectives are as follows:

- 1- Generate insights into the use of social media in news production at mainstream media outlets in Oman, with a specific focus on Oman TV.
- 2- Explore the impact of the use of social media in newsroom operations and the implications of citizens' news reporting within this process.





- 3- To explore the challenges encountered by professional journalists while producing stories sourced from social media and citizens about local conflict events.

The research questions are as follows.

- **RQ1:** How do news professionals use social media in newsroom operations in Oman?
- **RQ2:** What are the views of news professionals on the use of social media and the practice of citizens' news reporting in Oman?
- **RQ3:** What are the implications of news professionals' use of social media for news production about local conflict events in Oman?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because of the limited research into the role of social media in Omani newsroom operations. Its significance lies in elucidating the challenges faced by journalists and news organizations when integrating social media into their news production processes. The study also presents potential solutions to these challenges. Furthermore, it addresses a gap in the existing literature as there is a paucity of research on media production in Oman, particularly regarding the utilization of social media in journalistic practices. Moreover, this investigation has the potential to provide valuable insights for Omani government officials and legislators regarding the evolving landscape of media and journalism, which may inform them during the establishment of improved laws and regulations. For journalists and editors, this study underscores the need to engage in additional training regarding news verification techniques to mitigate the risks associated with incorporating social media into news production.

### **Research Design and Sampling**

Qualitative research is characterized by its ability to provide an in-depth exploration of phenomena. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to examine the perceptions of Omani professional journalists regarding the integration of social media into newsroom operations. This study offers comprehensive insight into the current perspectives, methodologies, and challenges associated with social media integration into Oman's news industry. The study participants were media professionals from Oman TV, which is Oman's sole television station that produces news. Their newsroom, which is designated as the News Centre at the Ministry of Information, functions as the primary newsroom for public media in Oman. This study employed a purposive sampling approach to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct news production experience.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four distinct groups, each corresponding to a unique stage in the news production process. The



four groups were labelled - gathering, selection, editing, and presentation and interaction. Two participants at each stage of the news production process were invited to contribute, with one senior editorial team member from the Oman TV newsroom in each group. The sample was composed of reporters 1-2, editors 1-2, electronic news specialists 1-2, and news producers 1-2. The official job titles were designated by Oman TV and correspond to their journalistic positions. Participants were queried regarding the significance of integrating social media into newsroom operations, which has become crucial during event coverage, particularly for sensitive local conflicts.

This sample was selected as the most suitable to achieve the objectives of the study, because the research community is represented by journalists working in the news industry in the visual media in Oman. As Oman TV is the only television channel in the Sultanate that provides a news service, the selection of journalists ensured access to opinions and experiences that reflect the reality of television news production in the country. Moreover, according to the organizational structure of the Ministry of Information, journalists working for Oman TV functionally belong to both the *ONA* and the Sultanate of Oman Radio. This adds an additional dimension to the importance of this sample, as their work is not limited to television production only, but extends to work within the broader national news ecosystem.

The sample size of eight television journalists was sufficient to achieve the objectives of the study, given the limited research community, where all journalists working in television news production in Oman are represented. In addition, during the interviews, the research reached theoretical saturation, which is the point where the new interviews do not add any new information or ideas to the study, because: (1) the research focuses on a very specific phenomenon, which is the use of social media in news production; (2) the homogeneity of the sample because they all belong to the same institution and the government sector; and (3) the presence of repetition and similarity in the data that was extracted from all the interviews. Journalists were given a consent letter to sign, stating that they had the right to withdraw from the interview at any time, and the interviews were audiotaped with the written consent of the participants.

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data. According to Clark and Brown (2017), thematic analysis is an appropriate approach to identifying and analyzing recurring patterns in data, allowing the interpretation of key meanings and ideas expressed by participants. This type of analysis helps organize complex data by categorizing them into consistent topics, making it easier to identify key trends and draw conclusions. This



method involves categorizing information into primary groups based on specific factors and classifications (Clarke and Braun 2017). Through repeated exposure to the interview recordings during these stages, the researcher developed a comprehensive familiarity with the data, which facilitated subsequent thematic analysis (Terry et al. 2017).

To ensure reliability, careful steps were followed in the coding process. The data was coded using a circular methodology to ensure that each data segment was repeated and examined multiple times (Gonzalez, Giannerini, and Rosa 2011; Ulichney, Gaubatz, and Simske 2013). Coding began with the identification of initial codes based on the main topics that emerged through the interviews. The codes were then reviewed and modified according to the patterns that appeared in the data, ensuring that the markup accurately reflected the content of the participants.

## Results and Discussion

Analysis of the interview data resulted in two main themes. The first theme involves factors reflecting the use of social media, with sub-themes of sourcing, editorial policies, presentation platforms, and future use. The second theme pertains to views regarding the development of citizen journalism in Oman, with sub-themes consisting of verification, soft news as an exception, and editorial decisions.

### *Factors Reflecting the Use of Social Media*

The research identified five key areas where social media impacts journalistic practices. They are sourcing news, identifying current events, audience outreach, editorial guidelines, and public interaction.

### *Sourcing News*

Social media has changed the way journalists access sources, reaching eyewitnesses or participants in events directly through their posts or comments. In cases of crises or natural disasters, journalists can rely on videos or photos from ordinary citizens that are published instantaneously on social media. Thus, social media became a valuable resource to generate stories in news production. These platforms offer easy access to diverse voices and rich content from across the world (Van Leuven, Deprez, and Heinrich 2013; Rohde et al. 2016). However, as revealed through interviews, some journalists and editors at Oman TV consider social media unnecessary for certain aspects of news production, such as editing. Participants also prioritize more credible sources, such as government agencies over social media. The results indicate that the news editing process—particularly fact-checking—relies primarily on official government sources especially in conflict issues, whereas social media serves as a secondary resource. Oman TV generally appeared to rely on social media and UGC as secondary information sources, especially when primary sources—such as government



agencies or officials—were unavailable. According to editor-1, priority is given to official institutional accounts when utilizing social media for information gathering. As such, citizen accounts serve as a secondary source. Nevertheless, the respondents acknowledged the importance of monitoring social media to gauge public opinion. A contingent of journalists from Oman TV's newsroom emphasized the significance of social media as an information source. Further elaborating on this point, reporter-1 stated:

“Social media have transformed the entire media landscape and altered numerous aspects of our lifestyles. It has provided journalists with many strengths, including interaction and speed of publication; it is a substantial addition to the news production process.”

Although the Oman TV reporters are directed to use government official sources, they are also encouraged to keep an eye on social media to know more about the events. Reporter-2 added:

“We have benefited significantly from social media networks; especially as other government institutions are directed to post their news on social media. In this case, social media allows us as journalists to read the content and observe how other users interact with it, which may lead to more extensive details in our news about certain events or issues.”

The participants also mentioned receiving direct instructions from management to cover stories that originated on social media, such as reporting on a viral video created by young Omanis regarding the escalating costs of marriage.

Despite Oman TV's desire to incorporate information sourced from social media, other micro-level factors pose challenges, which include the absence of regulations governing social media integration in newsroom operations. Some journalists noted they could not always use social media content because of the lack of guidance or editorial policy. Rebillard and Touboul (2010), as well as Hodge (2018), defined editorial policy as a set of rules and general guidelines that dictate how news media covers events, how journalists report them, methods of information gathering, and approaches to publishing and presenting content. Although Oman TV currently has no formal policy regarding the use of social media as a news source, these platforms have indirectly influenced journalists. Meanwhile, journalists can access official accounts that are maintained by government organizations for news and updates, as well as to gauge public sentiment on various issues and events. However, social media is not considered a primary source of information, except in specific instances. The electronic news specialist-2 explained:



“We do not heavily rely on social media for news creation, but our newsroom staff should be aware of local affairs, which social media can help with.”

Participants pointed out that this poses a challenge for them because they may be familiar with information circulated by citizens that is factually correct, but they are obliged to take information from government sources only, as Oman TV is a government station and relies only on official sources.

### *Editorial Policies*

With the emergence of social media as a source of information and news, especially on local issues, media institutions are moving to develop editorial policies that determine the extent to which this new medium can be used in newsroom operations. This is one of the prominent effects that social media has had on the news production (Adornato and Frisch 2022; Lu, Wei, and Liang 2025). The utilization of social media in, particularly for information gathering, was permitted. However, it was not systematically implemented in Oman TV. As such, the preferences of individual journalists would determine whether they employ social media for information acquisition, which is influenced by the absence of editorial guidelines regarding the use of these digital platforms. Moreover, any guidelines that are in place are subject to variation, which reporter-2 indicated:

“...our news policy varies depending on the event. What is acceptable for broadcast today might not be tomorrow, and what is suitable for airing now may be inappropriate in a few hours.”

Despite the absence of formal guidelines or editorial policies concerning social media integration in news gathering at Oman TV, certain areas of newsroom operations have adopted it as a standard practice. For instance, weather reports frequently incorporate content from social media and citizens, particularly during periods of heavy precipitation. This point was elaborated upon by news producer-1:

“While there is no written policy on utilizing social media networks for news production, it has become standard practice to consult these platforms for footage of precipitation and its impact.”

In recent years, the channel has intensified its focus on topics of general interest, which includes social media content. News producer-1 observed that monitoring public opinion trends has become integral in the process of news selection. As such, active monitoring of social media plays a crucial role in identifying current affairs and trending topics. However, all the participants agreed that the primary issue regarding social media



inclusion was the absence of editorial policy. However, referencing social media for soft news that is shared by citizens has become standard practice. The staff seeks a policy that regulates this practice in all aspects of news production, rather than attempting to resist these changes.

### *Presentation Platforms*

While professional journalists of Oman TV believe social media is an important newsgathering tool, Oman TV maintains social media accounts primarily to disseminate unaltered recordings of newscasts. The lone exception being the X account (formerly Twitter), which features breaking news and video clips. An electronic news specialist-1 stated:

“Our initial social media account was established on Twitter in 2012. Initially, our activity was limited; however, our accounts are now more active and [we] post with increased frequency.”

The News Centre’s social media presence aims to connect the public with newscasts and updates from across the nation while serving as a contemporary information dissemination method. In 2012, the Centre established the Electronic News Section to oversee and manage Oman’s television news social media presence. According to participants, this portion of Oman TV focuses on posting news content, which includes breaking news, TV broadcast news clips, informational videos on various topics, and live streaming of newscasts. An electronic news specialist-1 asserted:

“Viewers can now access newscasts from any global location through their account on X, as well as live events broadcast on the Oman Live channel.”

The electronic news specialist-1 also noted that the Electronic News Section produced specialized videos for social media, which cover topics such as culture, tourism, social issues, and other soft news.

According to electronic news specialist-2, the Electronic News Section enhances staff capabilities through various specialized training programs, both domestically and internationally.

“We have sent social media team members to Tunisia and Al-Jazeera in Qatar, and conducted local workshops, including one on mobile video reporting.”

The News Centre accounts demonstrate a lack of audience engagement through comments or interactions with posts from citizens. According to electronic news specialist-1, these accounts primarily function to disseminate news and information, without the capability to upload reader comments. The electronic news specialist-1 further elaborated:

“We tend to delete some abusive responses, but we don't



utilize this feature because we respect our followers and appreciate their views, but we don't respond to comments, especially the abusive ones.”

Although there is no significant interest in interacting with audience, some attention was given to comments that contained constructive and positive viewpoints, which was mentioned by electronic news specialist-2:

“We are monitoring some positive responses. There is a growing interest in monitoring responses for the purpose of developing news production.”

### *Future Use*

Media professionals in the Omani news industry anticipate an increased influence of social media on future news production processes. More specifically, they expect social media will play a more significant role in broadcasting when compared to other television channels based in the Middle East. They perceive social media as a powerful tool that can enhance newscasts with up-to-date content, particularly real-time eyewitness accounts. However, they emphasized the importance of caution when incorporating this content because of potential verification issues. To this end, reporter-1 stated:

“We require legislation to govern social media use in news production; however, it is first necessary to understand how to interact with social media platforms. Just as we developed an understanding of how to engage with newspapers, radio, and television, we now need to cultivate a new awareness of how to navigate our current trending medium.”

Reporter-1 emphasized the necessity for journalists to have a clear understanding of various aspects, which included filtering topics especially those related to conflicts, avoiding deception by fake accounts and pseudonyms, and refraining from judging individuals based on personal beliefs. In contrast, editor-1 posited that public acceptance would be crucial to determine whether to expand the broadcast space generated for social media.

“If the public embraces this concept, the broadcast space allocated to social media news could potentially expand in the future.”

Certain journalists perceived media development as contingent on societal progress, while positing that if the media failed to maintain pace with societal trends and changes, it would be rendered ineffective. News producer-1 asserted that television played a crucial role in adapting to societal changes and advocated for increased emphasis on social media. This news producer postulated this approach would prevent society from losing



confidence in Omani media or becoming reliant on foreign owned or operated media outlets. News producer-1 also emphasized the significance of a comprehensive editorial policy, which would facilitate incorporation of social media topics into news production and provide guidance on the appropriate timing, as well as methods, for utilizing social media in news selection.

### *Views Regarding the Development of Citizen Journalism in Oman*

Oman TV incorporates citizen input into various news segments, although the process appears to lack systematic organization and structure. The interviews revealed that journalists conceptualize citizen journalism as a method of transforming ordinary individuals into reporters, which enables them to disseminate information, images, and other UGC. While journalists at Oman TV recognize the value of citizen journalism in enhancing news production and serving as a crucial information source, they also note its potential to prompt the editorial team to address certain events that were previously overlooked. However, coverage must be aligned with government preferences.

News producer-1 posited that citizen journalism could enhance news quality, particularly in terms of visual content.

“For instance, we once needed to report on wildlife violator attacks. We discovered that the official wildlife monitoring agency's account had posted relevant images, which we utilized and credited as our source.”

Regarding the most notable news values in citizen-generated content, news producer-1 observed that these varied depending on the event. Meanwhile, no specific value was consistently present. However, citizen media coverage frequently alerts journalists to significant events that warrant broader public awareness. News producer-2 identified several guiding factors in citizen journalism, which include rapid event coverage and distribution potential, but also highlights a frequent lack of credibility. They elaborated:

“Social media networks facilitate rapid dissemination of false and targeted information. This is a common occurrence in the social media landscape, as evidenced by the numerous global incidents. For instance, during the Arab Spring, citizens utilized social media platforms to disseminate rumors and often inaccurate news, contributing to their unreliability.”

Meanwhile, reporter-1 shared their experience of erroneously publishing outdated images from social media, despite having communicated with the user to verify the time and location of the photographs. This incident served as a reminder that social media content





should not be accepted without critical evaluation, as mentioned by reporter-1:

“A dedicated team should be established to handle citizen journalism and social media, ensuring news quality and enhancing our bulletins with valuable content.”

While acknowledging the potential of social media as a secondary information source, Oman TV journalists noted that social media can be anonymous and potentially utilized to serve personal agendas or disseminate unverified information. News Centre Management strongly advised journalists to exercise extreme caution when utilizing information gleaned from social media and citizen journalists.

### *Verification*

The rapid spread of content via social media has created significant pressure on news organizations and journalists to speed up publishing, leading to a noticeable shift in the verification process. In the past, the verification of sources and information took longer and underwent more complex procedures. Now, in light of competition with social media platforms, journalists are sometimes forced to adopt faster or only partial verification techniques, especially when dealing with citizen content or viral videos.

The study found the verification procedure on Oman TV was limited to communication with official government entities. Verifying information primarily involved contacting state officials or agencies for all journalists, reporters, and editors in the News Centre. This is due to Oman TV's status as an official government institution, which thus reflects official positions. In a few instances, journalists extended their verifications beyond government and official entities. Regarding this point, reporter-2 stated:

“We endeavor to confirm information by reaching out to official authorities for verification or refutation of specific details, but this does not preclude us from occasionally publishing unverified information in extremely rare cases, depending on the nature of the news. However, I cannot mention a specific instance at present.”

The editors also mentioned occasionally revisiting social media to confirm the names and titles for trustworthiness, which was explained by editor-1:

“When there is certain information that I could not verify through official sources, we can return to social media networks to seek indications of the authenticity of the story, such as examining the profile of a particular user, verifying



someone's job title, etc., but this remains within limits and we do not employ this technique frequently.”

Regarding UGC—such as photographs and videos of rainfall, floods, and wadis—the verification process involved direct communication with the citizen who shared the footage. Regarding this point, news producer-1 stated:

“We broadcast the photographs after verifying with the citizens who posted them by directly messaging them and ensuring that the footage was captured on the same day, and in the correct location.”

Research indicates that digital tools can assist journalists and editors in content verification. However, Oman TV has yet to implement such measures at the time of the study. Editorial teams were not accustomed to using software to authenticate UGC. Meanwhile, news producer-2 emphasized the significance of employing these applications to avoid disseminating false imagery or footage:

“Integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into journalism is crucial for maintaining pace with global trends. We receive vast amounts of information, images, and tweets containing both accurate and false content, necessitating the use of AI to facilitate differentiation.”

Although journalists attempted to verify information primarily through official channels, they encountered challenges, such as uncooperative authorities and incomplete information. Reporter-1 elaborated:

“Certain official bodies are reluctant to provide comprehensive details on specific matters, demonstrating a disinclination to engage with journalists. In other instances, procrastination and delays in the release of information exist. They selectively disclose information, thereby complicating the verification process.”

Consequently, journalists and editors frequently opt to omit such information entirely while choosing not to produce news related to the event.

Certain Oman TV journalists posited the proliferation of inaccurate and biased information on social media platforms was a primary factor in their reluctance to consider it as a reliable source of information. Reporter-1 suggested that content from citizen journalists often lacks veracity and is frequently driven by emotional responses. The journalist identified several drawbacks to incorporating social media in news gathering, which includes emotions overshadowing facts, presentation of incomplete and unverified



information, posts used for personal vendettas, and fake profiles that prevent journalists from identifying true sources.

### *Soft News as an Exception*

Oman TV primarily utilizes social media as an information source for humanitarian and social subjects, particularly those categorized as soft news. Reporter-1 noted that individual-focused topics, such as commercial or business activities, could be covered. However, for strategic matters, which includes port and airport operations, financial performance, political strategies, and social media, UGC was not considered reliable. As such, competent entities were consulted when it involved this type of information.

Reporter-2 stated that topics derived from social media were generally positive, as negative subjects could compromise their credibility and lead to legal ramifications. He emphasized their preference for presenting positive news with absolute credibility. Negative topics were characterized as information that could undermine credibility or disseminate unfounded rumors/opinions. However, criticism and problem-reporting could be incorporated into news bulletins and programs produced by the News Centre, provided they were verified.

While journalists favored using social media for lighter topics, they were not prohibited from employing it to uncover information on negative subjects. However, they exercised caution, which is evidenced in their obtaining official confirmation or verifying the information at the incident location. Reporter-2 illustrated this with an example of a major water-pipe explosion in Muscat, which generated significant social media attention. He personally visited the scene and produced a television report, which demonstrated their authority to use social media as either an information source or a catalyst for further investigation.

Journalists at Oman TV endeavor to present news in a favorable light by avoiding the negative aspects of certain events or issues. News producer-1 stated that when covering significant national events such as the Al Shura Council elections, they disregarded irregularities in the election process while adhering to Oman TV's implicit editorial policy:

“While it is not professional to conceal these facts and occurrences, our approach dictates that we cannot criticize the election process. Displaying citizens' posts that critique the election proceedings would imply our endorsement of these criticisms, deviating from our established news coverage approach.”

As such, newsroom managers and editors instructed journalists to moderate coverage of certain events. The same news producer reported this occurred during his coverage of cyclones affecting the country, and the



subsequent evacuation of residents who were reluctant to abandon their homes and animals. Although the reporter included this information in his coverage, he was directed not to address the issue any further.

### *Editorial Decisions*

The impact of trending topics on social media has increasingly influenced editorial decision making in the newsroom, as journalists frequently adjust their coverage to align with content that gains online attention. In contrast, this practice appears to be less significant in the Oman TV newsroom, where editorial priorities are driven by different factors. The inclusion or exclusion of trending news stories in broadcasts is determined during editorial team meetings at the News Centre. While these meetings establish a daily news agenda, the final decisions are in the hands of the newscast producer. Department heads and the News Centre Chief are also responsible for evaluating certain news items and determining their suitability for broadcasting. This was expounded upon by editor-2:

“I possess the authority to select or omit specific news items. Numerous sensitive topics and events, such as food poisoning incidents, crimes, and fires, were initially reported on social media platforms, particularly X. However, such data cannot be disseminated without official confirmation. In one instance, I opted to retain information from social media regarding poisoning events in a particular area. Due to the absence of an official source, we promptly dispatched a television reporter to verify and provide comprehensive coverage of the incident.”

When Oman TV utilized information from social media, it acknowledged the source either on-screen or via voice-over. This was pointed out by editor 2:

“The press and endorsement secretariat mandates that we cite our sources, and we typically display posts from X in their original form.”

One challenge faced by newscast producers while deciding whether to include social media content is the rapid dissemination of information. This creates difficulties for news editors who must balance their primary responsibilities while monitoring social media platforms.

### **Key Findings**

Oman TV refrains from addressing local conflict matters or news that circulates on social media via UGC. Nevertheless, journalists and editorial staff at Oman TV routinely monitor citizen-generated content for potential news value. They recognize the significant role that citizen journalists play as eyewitnesses. However, they also harbor reservations regarding the reliability of social media sources, which include citizen journalists. This skepticism



stems from the absence of a clear editorial policy regarding the usage of new media sources, as well as the anonymity of UGC that necessitates meticulous content verification. The verification process at Oman TV, which is a regional channel, differs from other global stations due to it being limited to government sources or official government social media accounts. While this approach enhances credibility, it may limit the speed of news coverage compared to global media organizations that have developed more flexible verification protocols and sophisticated digital tools for verifying digital content, allowing them to benefit from citizen journalism in specific situations without compromising the accuracy of the news. Moreover, specialized training courses can enhance journalists' skills in evaluating digital sources and dealing with news circulating on social media platforms.

Regarding other citizen journalism indicators, Oman TV journalists consider UGC to be valuable contributions from citizens. While most journalists believe social media is significant and most prominent in the news gathering, it is only used as a presentation tool for Oman TV. Other stages exhibited limited social media use due to Oman TV's substantial reliance on government sources and content. While the government emerged as the most influential factor, journalists retained some autonomy in social media usage as there were no official restrictions. Despite recognizing the importance of social media as a content source, journalists often avoid using it due to the lack of a clear editorial policy. This hesitancy is linked to Oman TV's primary dependence on government sources. Although the management encourages the inclusion of social media sources, journalists are cautioned regarding content credibility. Oman TV journalists acknowledge the significance of social media, particularly citizen journalists, during event coverage. The government oversees the verification process, and when verification is not feasible, Oman TV journalists refrain from covering the event. This reality reflects a dilemma facing traditional media organizations in the age of digitization, as they seek to maintain their credibility while dealing with a massive influx of unreliable information. Developing clear editorial guidelines can reduce journalists' reluctance to use social media sources, enhancing Omani television's resilience in dealing with news updates. Striking a balance between relying on government sources and being open to reliable digital content can contribute to enhancing the quality of news content.

Oman TV lacks a dedicated team for sourcing news from social media as only the Electronic News Section staff post offline news onto social media platforms. Journalists at Oman TV believe in the importance of having a dedicated and specialized team to produce news based on UGC, provided management supports this direction. They perceived societal factors as influential in news production, which lead them to avoid controversial topics and focus on positive stories as directed by senior



management. In general, Oman TV journalists prefer a neutral language that aligns with editorial policies. From this angle, the question arises about the extent to which Oman TV can interact with digital diversity in a way that reflects the plurality of societal opinions, away from restricting controversial topics. In doing so, the challenge is for the media to be impartial and objective in reporting news, without being severely affected by social pressures. In addition, the trend towards presenting positive stories reflects a desire to adhere to societal values that favor avoiding escalation or clashes. The solution may be to adopt a media approach that promotes diversity by reviewing the role of new media in building the media reality, and activating an open community dialogue that can enhance the credibility of Omani television in the eyes of its followers.

In conflict events coverage, Oman TV journalists relied exclusively on government sources while avoiding social media and posts coming from citizens. The research revealed that Oman's TV leadership, which includes managers and newsroom editors, recognized the importance of social media in the various stages of news production. Journalists and editors emphasized the news-gathering stage as the most crucial, which reflects how, when, and where information should be collected. Some have also noted the significance of social media in news selection and editing. While these stages were mentioned less frequently, the participants acknowledged that access to social media networks—particularly X—facilitated the verification of information from official government accounts. All participants agreed regarding the importance of social media in the news presentation stage, viewing it as vital for sharing news with their audience and providing live-streaming capabilities.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the perceptions of professional journalists in Oman regarding the opportunities and challenges associated with utilizing social media content in their newsroom operations. Through semi-structured interviews with journalists and editors from Oman TV, the study provides insight into the current perspectives and challenges related to social media integration in Oman's news industry. The findings reveal that while journalists acknowledge the importance of social media as a valuable resource for story generation and gauging public opinion, they face challenges such as the absence of clear editorial guidelines, concerns regarding information credibility, and the time-consuming process of thorough verification processes. The study highlights the influence of various factors on the use of social media in news reporting, which includes government directives, organizational policies, and individual preferences. The results underscore the need for media organizations to adapt to the evolving landscape of journalism by developing systematic approaches to handle UGC while continuing to invest in training programs to enhance



their journalist's skills in navigating social media platforms effectively. From these findings, there seems to be an urgent need to develop flexible editorial policies that ensure the use of social media as a media tool, taking into account the requirements of accuracy and credibility. Media organizations in Oman should invest more resources to develop teams specialized in dealing with news from social media platforms, which will contribute to ensuring that journalists have access to accurate, reliable and timely news.

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