

JOB SKILLS AND NEWS PHOTOGRAPHERS: A STUDY OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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Abstract

Unlike in various countries Indian print media is still in a commanding position when compared with the electronic media. Though to see is to believe is the practice still there are millions of people prefer reading news paper to watching television for news. This is evident with the increase in circulation and readership of indian newspapers. This trend is observed in various states in the country so also in the state of Andhra Pradesh where news papers have won the patronage of people at large. The state which is well known for vernacular journalism is encouraging English news papers as well. One of the reasons for the growth is printing of many color pages in newspapers when compared to the earlier times. Along with special supplements in the form of lifestyle supplements, pages, page three stories apart from the regular beats such as sports, science which are visually striking regular pages are also appearing in bright colors. With these factors the professional news photography has emerged strong. These have been made possible with appointed of innumerable number of photographers by the news papers recently. Like never before just like regular journalists who report and edit newspapers the photographers are also joining the organizations in large scale as regular employees and have been updating skills on a regular basis. The study of news photographers working in Andhra Pradesh showed that many of them have been joining the job after acquiring training and some of them are getting training later either by the organization or get it on their own.

Key words: news photography, page three, special supplements, beats

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Introduction

The role of news photographers in fulfilling the duty of making news papers as socially responsible is considered to be significant. For any photographer thorough understanding of camera operation, lighting, composition, darkroom procedures and the special properties of films and papers are required in their job. But news photography demands special skills. The nature of job requires some additional as well as proactive skills to fulfill the requirements of the profession. Unlike general photography here the photographer cannot afford to have complete freedom and have to abide by the agenda of the media organization for which they have been working, certain news values and ethics as well. To suit these needs the news photographers have to be skillful enough to maintain quantity as well as quality in their work.

Sophisticated photo imaging, intricate color information techniques, special effects, graphics are evident in the multicolored, exclusively designed special as well as regular pages of newspapers. The digital imaging technology facilitated newsroom “convergence” points to the integration of technological and graphical knowledge with traditional journalistic knowledge (Maria Trombly, 2000). To put these new technologies for effective utility media managers aggressively seek for those professionals who are endowed with the skills, and those who have undergone necessary training. This study explores the relative importance of knowledge of presentation technologies and skills of photographers working in newspapers. Multimedia skills are a recent and unexpected addition to the digital photography. In late 1990s taking quality photographs, editing them, providing captions and having proficiency in Photoshop were considered to be the most important photojournalistic skills (Russial and Wanta, 1998).

With the convergence of broadcast, print, and web technology experienced by many newsrooms around the country in addition to the software for pagination programs, photo-imaging programs, Web-editing programs photographers are required to shoot, edit the photos as well as the text, visualize, shape page designs, graphics and at the same time present the content for the web editions also (John Russial, 1998). Research studies include the following findings: computer skills are considered highly important in assessing applicants for reporting, editing, and design position newspaper editors who design list technological knowledge as the skill they most wish they possessed; (Auman, 1995) and ”digital darkroom skills” are second only to “good portfolio”

in hiring criteria for photojournalism. Technological expertise appears to be rivaling professional journalism knowledge in online work (Lowrey and Becker, 2001)

A 1999 study of managers in online newspaper publishing found that management gives greater weight to multimedia skills and computer knowledge than journalism experience while appointing manpower in the jobs. A 2000 survey of online news managers found managers value both traditional journalism skills and Web knowledge such as the ability to write HTML (Chris Harvey, 2000). In screening theory educational credentials are viewed as a tool for employers. As a tool, however, they are inexact. But employers do not focus on specific educational credentials but instead roughly estimate competencies with a general understanding (James N. Baron and William T. Bielby, 1980). If evidence of productive capacity through on-the-job experience is available educational qualification becomes secondary. For professional and technical jobs focus would be more on technical skills more than behavior or trainability of the candidates (Paul Osterman, 1995). Previous job performance and technical expertise have been found to be more important than educational record or personality traits in hiring decisions.

The literature suggests the news media, for example, whether print, Web, or TV, do not require staff-created content to function. Candidates who have job-specific skills and knowledge are most likely to find work. Therefore it is proposed here that skill with presentation technology should significantly impact degree of job-entry success by those seeking media positions. This study focuses on the potential benefit of learning such skills in before entering the job market or during the job. Educational institutions provide training to candidates for highly specialized skills and whereas professional's experiences go beyond the classroom, and internships involvement with media activities, provide more exposure to job-specific skills. Transferred to the individual level of the employee, these arguments suggest that graduates with specific skills will have more success in the job market than those without those specific skills. Consequently these specific skills will explain variance in job-seeking success once other less general skill sets are controlled for. This argument can be restated as the following two hypotheses.

Technical skills and knowledge of production would be prioritized over skills and knowledge involved with crafting content. In an edited excerpt from her new book, "*Photography of the Age*", Kathleen Whelan sets out six essential skills press photographers need to be successful in their jobs. They are flexibility, communication, general knowledge and interest, be prepared, see

the potential and know your camera. They also need to have dependability, cooperation, attention to detail, self control, integrity, adaptability/flexibility, initiative, persistence, stress tolerance, concern for others, penchant for innovation, achievement/effort, independence, social orientation, leadership and analytical thinking.

In order to prepare broadcast journalism students for the dynamic nature of the industry, it has become more important than ever for educators to stay abreast of the evolution of skills and attributes that are most important for employment and success in the journalism profession today.

A content analysis of three year period of employment opportunities posted by the top 10 broadcast journalism companies in the United States showed a significant increase in multimedia skills required by employers (Wenger and Owens, 2011). The need for students to work in teams and for educators to create or simulate deadline pressure in assignments is critical. The ability to post content to the web, to write for the web, to shoot video and still photos and to work within the mobile and social media spaces seem to be essential. According to a survey of news directors, a third said they expected to add staff in 2011, ten times as many as they had expected to cut. News executives believe the internet is changing the fundamental values of journalism, putting the emphasis on immediacy. Researchers have found that gaining real-world experience with the technology in today's newsrooms helps college students get jobs in the industry after graduation (Neidorf, 2008).

Research has shown that employers often feel recent communication graduates do not possess the skills necessary to perform job functions (Adams 2008; Lepre & Bleske, 2005; Mattern, 2003; McDonough, Rodriguez, & Prior-Miller, 2009). Hines and Basso (2008) found that “an alarming number of communication professionals report that entry-level employees possess poor writing skills and even poorer editing skills” (p.293). Criado and Krapeplin (2003) surveyed 240 journalism programs and found that nearly 85% had adopted a convergence curriculum in response to the industry emphasis on convergence. According to a study by Lepre and Bleske (2005), nearly all educators and journalism professionals agreed that strong writing was the most important skill for students to master and web skills are becoming increasingly important to broadcast employers. Brown and Collins (2010) surveyed television news personnel and report that while traditional skills like writing are still key, there is a demand for knowledge

of how to use multimedia elements to enhance news stories. In 2005, Kraeplin and Criado surveyed newspaper and TV executives, and reported that a majority believe convergence skills are important for new hires. The researchers concluded that “Increasingly, the demands of a converged media system ensure that young journalists’ careers will be less stable and predictable than in the past” (p. 49). Dickson and Brandon (2000) found that one of the most valued practices was the cross-training of students in more than one media field. They also reported that a gap exists between professional journalists and journalism educators concerning aspects of journalism education.

Moody (2010) concluded that many communication education programmes had not modified their course curricula to include new technology skills that reflect those used in the industry. Massey (2010) found that job advertisements for newspaper and broadcast reporters should have multiplatform skills by legacy news organizations. Newspapers particularly sought reporters who could also shoot news video. “Technological changes, shifts in news consumption habits and audience demographics, fickle economic conditions, and more have put newspapers and TV stations under pressure to do more with fewer reporters” (p.145).

After the photographer completes the assignment of photos either himself or the photo editor would go through them and decide as to which angle is better and how many of them are useful for publications. The photo editor will not just work with the photographer and pick the best photo(s) for the story, but also critique how the photographer did on that assignment. The photo editor will look at the film and discuss with the photographer their approach to the assignment. He points out the positive things about the work the photographer did as well as discusses how it could have been done better. Here in this case all the respondents said that they have freedom in the selection of subjects of photos.

Research methodology

In the era of convergence the photographers cannot limit themselves only to take photos, edit them but have to write captions and provide other related information for each picture. Some of the photo journalists participate in the page designing as well. Training and skills development

for all media and culture workers is of crucial importance, especially in the context of radical changes taking place in the industry, and when technology and a fundamentally changed media landscape are requiring new skills (Bibby, 2014). In this context photographer's status of skills has been surveyed by the researchers. A purposive sample of 170 respondents has been selected and their skills were studied. The sample was taken from undivided state of Andhra Pradesh. A structured questionnaire was administered to the sample and the data was analysed.

Data analysis

To start with the news photographers have themselves become very wise in their academics and have been updating and honing up skills with the availability of training facilities. Some of them have been taking up even Diploma /Certificate in Photography course. Among the sample 37.6% took up photography course. And rest of them did not do it (Table 1).

Table 1

Percentage distribution of respondents according to the degree/Diploma/Certificate in Photography course

S.No	Photography course	fr	%
1	Yes	64	37.6
2	No	106	62.4
	Total	170	100

Respondents preferred to take the course either in their permitted training period or later to update the skills. Among the 64 respondents who have taken photography course, 75% said that they completed the course before taking up the job, 23.43% after joining the job and only 1.56% after quitting the job (Table 2).

Table 2

Percentage distribution of respondents according to the time of course taken up by them

S.No	Time of the course	fr	%
1	Before taking up the job	48	75

2	After joining the job	15	23.43
3	After quitting the job	1	1.56
4	Total	64	100

For journalists organizations generally provide training and it is rare in case of news photographers. Among the respondents, 56.5% took up the training in print media organization for photography remaining 43.5% said did not undergo training (Table 3).

Table 3

Percentage distribution of respondents who took up training

S.No	Training	fr	%
1	Yes	96	56.5
2	No	74	43.5
	Total	170	100

Photographers' training is also not uniformly scheduled in organization. Either they join the job with prior training or they would be trained after they join the job. Generally media organizations prefer to mould these professionals in the manner they want them to work. They want the employees to follow the organization's agenda, policies and ideologies. Among them 59.37% got trained in the present organization where they have been working followed by 37.5% in the first organisation they worked 3.12% took up training in the second organization they worked.(Table 4)

Table 4

Percentage distribution of respondents takes up training in organization

S.No	Training in Organisation	fr	%
1	in the first organisation where I worked	36	37.5
2	in the second organization	3	3.12
3	in the present organisation	57	59.37
	Total	96	100

Other than professional skills some of value based skills are also required for the effective functioning of news photographers. Among the respondents 55.3% said that the integrity is required as a special skill, and other claimed dependability (18.2%), self initiatives (8.2%), analytical thinking (4.1%), and self control (3.5%) are required. cooperation, attention to detail (2.9%) each, stress tolerance, achievement/effort, independence (1.8%) followed by others such as persistence (1.2%), adaptability/flexibility, concern for others, stress Tolerance, innovation are considered as the important skills required for the execution of the job. (Table 5)

Table 5**Percentage distribution of special skills required for respondents**

S.No	Special skills	fr	%
1	Dependability	31	18.2
2	Cooperation	5	2.9
3	Attention to Detail	5	2.9
4	Self Control	6	3.5
5	Integrity	94	55.3
6	Adaptability/Flexibility	1	0.6
7	Initiative	14	8.2
8	Persistence	2	1.2
9	Stress Tolerance	3	1.8
10	Concern for Others	1	0.6
11	Stress Tolerance	1	0.6
12	Innovation	1	0.6
13	Achievement/Effort	3	1.8
14	Independence	3	1.8
15	Leadership	1	0.6
16	Analytical Thinking	7	4.1
	Total	170	100

Conclusions

Ways must be found to impart skills in conjunction with more conceptual frame work under which the news photographers work. The data presented here suggest that job specific skills are widely distributed and uniformity is lacking. Optimum level of academic qualifications is also not attained by many of them. For the photographers to be successful in their career and to compete in the job market more specific skills are required. Future research may be taken up with regard to the skills that are required in view of the expected convergence in the field of news photography. Compared to earlier times now news photographers have been acquiring professional degrees is evident in the study where it has been found that more than one third of the sample have taken up Diploma /Certificate in Photography course. Among them many have completed they completed the course before taking up the job, as far as formal training is concerned majority took training in print media organization. Among them many of them got trained in the present organization and some of them did it in the first organization they worked. It has been found that ethical values are ascertained by news photographers is evident of value based skills observed in the study. Majority opined that integrity is required as a special skill, followed by dependability, self initiatives, analytical thinking, self control etc. Adaptability/flexibility, concern for others, stress Tolerance, innovation are considered as the important skills required for the execution of the job.

Suggestions

For improving the quality of professional standards of news photographers the following suggestions may be followed.

- They should be given proper formal training even after being appointed in the organization.
- Even before entering the career also the aspirants should train themselves in formal schools.
- Separate schools should be set up by media organizations to put up special thrust on news photography. These schools will help in updating the skills also.
- Unions, associations and other professional organizations should also conduct programmes for the sake of improvement of standards in the profession.
- Update skills of news photographers

- There is a serious need to provide periodical orientation to the photographers with regard to the equipment also.
- Periodical evaluation of skills and feedback from the concerned organization would help them in improving the skills
- Value added skills can be obtained by means of continuous motivation of the professional photographers.

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