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Sticks Journalism: Who Are Journalists, Who Are Not? The Identity Crisis of Professionals in Bangladesh and South Asia

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Sticks Journalism: Who Are Journalists, Who Are Not? The Identity Crisis of Professionals in Bangladesh and South Asia

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Abstract

The proliferation of smartphones and social media has reshaped journalistic practices across South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, where "selfie stick journalism" has emerged as a symbolic and practical marker of the new media age. This paper investigates how the democratization of media tools—mobile phones, selfie sticks, livestream platforms, and algorithmic news feeds—has redefined the boundaries of journalism, eroding traditional professional hierarchies and raising critical questions: Who qualifies as a journalist in a networked society? What constitutes journalistic authority, authenticity, and accountability when anyone can broadcast to millions? Drawing upon case studies from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, this study explores the identity crisis confronting professional journalists amidst the rise of "content creators," "citizen reporters," and "social influencers." The research combines theoretical frameworks from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, Manuel Castells's network society, and media convergence literature to examine shifts in professional legitimacy and epistemic authority. Empirical data are drawn from interviews with professional journalists, digital content creators, and social media analysts, as well as content analysis of viral "selfie journalism" incidents during major political and humanitarian events in 2024–2025. The findings suggest a profound transformation of journalistic identity: a movement from institutional to performative, from gatekeeping to self-branding, and from public service to algorithmic visibility. In South Asia's hybrid media ecology, the selfie stick becomes not just a tool but a metaphor for the spectacle, precariousness, and personalization of journalism itself.

Keywords: selfie journalism; Bangladesh; South Asia; digital identity; media convergence; citizen journalism; professionalism

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1. Introduction

1.1. The New Age of Selfie Sticks and Spectacle

In contemporary South Asian media landscapes, the image of a young reporter holding a smartphone attached to a selfie stick has become increasingly emblematic of journalism itself. Whether reporting live from political protests in Dhaka, floods in Assam, or election rallies in Islamabad, "selfie stick journalists" blur the line between professional and amateur, information and entertainment, and reporting and performance. The selfie sticks, once a symbol of personal leisure, now doubles as a professional apparatus for a new generation of journalists who depend on mobility, immediacy, and virality. This phenomenon raises a foundational question for journalism studies: Who counts as a journalist in the age of ubiquitous media technologies**?**

Bangladesh, as part of the broader South Asian media ecosystem, presents a unique case study in this regard. The nation's media transition over the last decade—from traditional newspapers and television toward mobile-based and algorithmically mediated platforms—has generated profound changes in news production, consumption, and ethics. The democratization of access to broadcasting tools through social media (Facebook Live, YouTube, TikTok) has enabled citizens to act as real-time witnesses, often outpacing mainstream media outlets in speed and reach. Yet, this same shift has

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destabilized professional journalism's epistemic authority, blurring distinctions between trained journalists and social media performers.

As Rahman (2022) observes, "The smartphone camera has replaced the press card as the new passport to journalistic legitimacy in Bangladesh's digital media space" (p. 41). This transformation invites a critical examination of how professional identity, public trust, and journalistic norms are being reconstructed in what could be termed the "post-professional" era of journalism.

1.2. From Gatekeepers to Content Creators: Shifting Media Boundaries

Traditionally, journalism has been conceptualized as a field of social practice defined by certain ethical, institutional, and epistemological boundaries (Schudson, 2003; Zelizer, 2019). Journalists were the "gatekeepers" of information, controlling access to public discourse through established media institutions that valued verification, accountability, and objectivity. However, the digital turn, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent platformization of news, has eroded these boundaries (Deuze, 2005; Anderson, 2013).

In South Asia, where mainstream media have often been constrained by state control, political patronage, or economic dependencies, social media emerged as an alternative space of expression (Uddin, 2021). Mobile-based journalism (MoJo) allowed individuals to bypass editorial censorship, challenging the monopoly of traditional gatekeepers. Yet, this empowerment also produced epistemic confusion. The rise of "content creators" who report, perform, and market themselves as "journalists" on YouTube or Facebook has led to professional anxiety within traditional newsrooms. The crisis is not only about employment or technology; it is a crisis of identity and legitimacy.

In Dhaka, for example, several viral incidents in 2024 illustrated this transformation. During the August 5, 2024 unrest, when mainstream television stations were restricted from live broadcasting, hundreds of independent streamers and vloggers used selfie sticks and mobile networks to report events in real time. While their footage circulated widely and often provided crucial visual documentation, professional journalists criticized the content as "unverified," "biased," or "performative." Conversely, audiences praised these individuals for their authenticity and immediacy. The competing claims of truth, representation, and professionalism thus reflect broader social tensions between institutional authority and digital populism.

1.3. Theoretical Orientation: Field, Network, and Algorithm

This paper approaches the "selfie stick journalism" phenomenon through a triangulated theoretical lens combining Bourdieu's (1998) field theory, Castells's (2009) network society, and the emerging literature on algorithmic public spheres (Gillespie, 2018; Napoli, 2019).

Bourdieu's concept of the journalistic field as a structured space of competition for symbolic capital helps explain how professional legitimacy is reproduced or contested. In traditional contexts, symbolic capital—derived from affiliation with established media, professional training, and adherence to journalistic norms—determined who could speak as a journalist. However, digital affordances have destabilized these hierarchies. The networked public sphere (Castells, 2009) replaces institutional boundaries with relational ones, where influence depends on connectivity, engagement, and algorithmic amplification rather than institutional recognition.

Within this hybrid system, algorithmic platforms function as new arbiters of visibility, determining which voices gain prominence. Journalists—professional or otherwise—must adapt to platform logics that reward affective storytelling, visual immediacy, and virality. Consequently, the "selfie stick journalist" embodies the convergence of professional aspiration and performative self-presentation, blending the roles of reporter, influencer, and activist.

This study argues that South Asian journalism is undergoing a paradigm shift from "objectivity-based professionalism" to "visibility-based professionalism," where the legitimacy of journalism increasingly depends on metrics of attention rather than ethics of verification.

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1.4. The Bangladeshi Media Context: Historical and Structural Overview

Bangladesh's media landscape offers a fertile ground for examining this identity crisis. Since the liberalization of private television channels in the early 2000s, the country has witnessed a rapid expansion of both traditional and digital media outlets (Islam, 2016). Simultaneously, the proliferation of affordable smartphones and 4G internet access has transformed audiences into potential content producers. As of 2025, Bangladesh has over **52 million active social media users** (DataReportal, 2025), with Facebook and YouTube serving as the dominant platforms for news consumption.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this shift. Many reporters began using mobile devices for remote reporting, and citizen journalists filled gaps left by disrupted newsroom operations (Kabir & Nasrin, 2021). The ease of livestreaming, coupled with audience interaction, fostered a participatory culture that blurred the distinction between journalist and viewer.

However, this transformation also coincides with increasing media repression, surveillance, and the enforcement of the Digital Security Act (DSA), which has been widely criticized for criminalizing digital expression (Human Rights Watch, 2024). As a result, both professional and citizen journalists operate under heightened uncertainty. Many turn to self-publishing and vlogging, seeing it as both an escape from institutional control and a form of self-empowerment. Yet, such autonomy often comes at the cost of professional recognition and financial stability.

The result is a dual crisis: the erosion of institutional journalism's authority and the precarity of digital journalism's authenticity.

1.5. South Asian Comparative Lens

While Bangladesh provides the focal point of this study, similar patterns are observable across South Asia. In India, the rise of "YouTube journalists" such as Dhruv Rathee and Ravish Kumar's online transition illustrate how professional and citizen boundaries blur under political and algorithmic pressures (Rao, 2022). In Pakistan, vloggers like Irfan Junejo and others function as informal news sources, often gaining larger audiences than state-aligned media outlets. In Sri Lanka and Nepal, digital activism and citizen reporting during crises—such as the 2022 economic protests—demonstrated the power of mobile journalism to mobilize publics.

Yet, the socio-political conditions in South Asia complicate this optimism. In environments where press freedom is fragile, the diffusion of journalism through mobile devices can both empower and endanger practitioners. The selfie stick journalist becomes at once a symbol of democratization and a target of repression.

These cross-regional patterns underscore a shared South Asian dilemma: journalism's transformation from a profession of collective responsibility to one of individualized self-performance mediated by digital platforms.

1.6. Selfie Stick as Symbol: Performance, Authenticity, and Control

The selfie sticks functions as more than a technological tool—it is a cultural symbol of mediated selfhood and performative journalism. Its use in journalism encapsulates broader shifts toward visual storytelling, individual branding, and audience interactivity. As Banaji (2021) argues, "The camera facing oneself becomes a site of both intimacy and authority, collapsing the distinction between witness and subject" (p. 78).

In Bangladesh, this performance is deeply entangled with class, gender, and generational dynamics. Young journalists and vloggers often deploy the selfie stick as an assertion of technological modernity and independence from traditional newsroom hierarchies dominated by senior male editors. For many women journalists, the selfie stick offers relative safety and autonomy in public spaces, enabling mobile reporting without large crews. Conversely, critics perceive the trend as symptomatic of declining journalistic depth and increasing narcissism—what Postman (1985) foresaw as "amusing ourselves to death."

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The tension between authenticity and performativity reflects the deeper epistemic shifts in digital journalism, where credibility is no longer established through institutional validation but through the aesthetics of immediacy, emotional appeal, and follower engagement.

1.7. Research Objectives and Questions

This paper seeks to analyze the **identity crisis** of journalists in Bangladesh and South Asia in light of the selfie stick phenomenon. It aims to:

1. Examine how digital technologies reshape journalistic professionalism and self-identification.
2. Investigate the sociological and ethical implications of "selfie stick journalism."
3. Compare professional journalists' perceptions with those of emerging citizen reporters in Bangladesh and neighboring South Asian contexts.
4. Explore how algorithms, audience metrics, and platform governance influence journalistic legitimacy.

Accordingly, the central research questions are:

- Who defines the boundaries of journalism in digital South Asia?
- How do new media technologies, particularly mobile and livestreaming tools, mediate journalistic identity?
- What tensions arise between institutional authority and individual expression in this hybrid ecology?

1.8. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to media and communication scholarship in three ways.

First, it offers an empirical and theoretical understanding of how professional journalism is reconstituted under digital disruption in South Asia—a region underrepresented in global journalism studies.

Second, it foregrounds the sociotechnical dimension of identity formation, showing how tools like selfie sticks are embedded within broader political economies of attention and surveillance.

Third, it opens a critical conversation about the future of journalistic ethics and education, urging media institutions to rethink professionalism beyond institutional affiliation toward participatory and accountable practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction: Rethinking Journalism in a Digital Ecology

The transformation of journalism under digital disruption has been one of the most debated subjects in global media studies over the past two decades. The transition from print to digital, from newsroom hierarchies to networked participation, and from institutional gatekeeping to algorithmic curation has profoundly redefined the profession. Scholars have increasingly asked: *What does it mean to be a journalist in a world where everyone can publish?* (Deuze, 2005; Carlson, 2015; Zelizer, 2019).

In South Asia, this question acquires added complexity due to socio-political constraints, low institutional autonomy, and the growing importance of mobile platforms as both news sources and public spaces (Banaji, 2021; Uddin, 2021). The rise of "selfie stick journalism"—a hybrid form of self-representation and live reporting through smartphones—embodies these transformations. To situate this phenomenon, this review examines five intersecting strands of scholarship:

1. Theories of digital and mobile journalism,
2. Citizen journalism and participatory cultures,
3. The professional identity crisis and symbolic capital,
4. Algorithmic mediation and platform governance, and
5. The South Asian media context, with emphasis on Bangladesh.

Together, these areas reveal how digital technologies disrupt journalism's epistemic boundaries and professional legitimacy.

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2.2. Digital Journalism: From Institutional Authority to Networked Practice

Digital journalism represents both a continuity and rupture with earlier journalistic practices. Pavlik (2001) first noted that the integration of digital technologies transforms the nature of news production, distribution, and consumption. Subsequent scholars have emphasized how the internet destabilized established hierarchies of credibility (Allan, 2006; Deuze, 2008). As Anderson (2013) argued, digitalization fragmented the "journalistic field," introducing new actors—bloggers, data scientists, influencers—who operate outside traditional newsroom boundaries yet command public trust.

In the early 2010s, studies highlighted the concept of **"**convergence journalism**"**, where multimedia production, cross-platform integration, and audience interactivity became central to newsroom operations (Jenkins, 2006; Domingo et al., 2008). This convergence accelerated with the rise of smartphones and social media. The mobile phone became a portable newsroom—capable of recording, editing, and broadcasting from anywhere (Westlund & Quinn, 2018). Mobile journalism (MoJo) has been described as both a democratizing force and a threat to editorial quality (Burum & Quinn, 2016).

The "selfie stick" epitomizes this mobile convergence: a device that enables self-framed, portable broadcasting while symbolizing autonomy from institutional infrastructures. For journalists in developing regions such as Bangladesh, it represents both technological empowerment and professional vulnerability. It allows access to marginalized areas or crisis zones without expensive equipment, but simultaneously exposes reporters to accusations of amateurism and spectacle (Rahman, 2022).

As digital journalism scholars note, the profession increasingly revolves around performance, visibility, and engagement metrics rather than institutional validation (Hermida, 2016; Carlson, 2018). This shift has profound implications for identity formation and ethical accountability.

2.3. Mobile Journalism (MoJo) and the Rise of Performative Newswork

Mobile journalism (MoJo) marks a significant reconfiguration of newswork. Westlund and Quinn (2018) describe it as a "practice where reporters use handheld digital technologies for news gathering, editing, and publishing." MoJo reduces physical and institutional constraints, enabling rapid responses to unfolding events. During crises—natural disasters, protests, or elections—mobile journalists often outperform traditional broadcasters in speed and accessibility (Burum & Quinn, 2016).

However, the ease of access to digital production tools also introduces new tensions. As Hannerz (2004) notes, journalism historically relied on collective verification and institutional discipline, but MoJo fosters an individualized and precarious work culture. Journalists must become "multi-skilled freelancers," blurring the boundaries between professional reporting, personal branding, and audience engagement.

In South Asia, these shifts manifest acutely due to limited newsroom resources and precarious employment. Studies from India, Nepal, and Bangladesh show that young reporters often rely on smartphones for both professional assignments and independent vlogging (Kabir & Nasrin, 2021; Pathak, 2020). The "selfie stick journalist" merges personal and professional identity—a form of performative newswork aimed at visibility in saturated media markets.

As Chouliaraki (2013) argues, digital technologies encourage "mediated performance," where journalists must constantly visualize their own presence to assert authenticity. This visual self-presentation—holding the camera toward oneself, addressing the audience directly—creates an affective connection but also risks collapsing the distinction between reporting and self-promotion.

The selfie sticks, therefore, becomes both tool and metaphor: a physical extension of the journalist's body that materializes the desire for self-legitimation in an environment of professional uncertainty.

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2.4. Citizen Journalism and Participatory Cultures

The phenomenon of "everyone being a journalist" is not new but has taken on unprecedented scale with social media. Gillmor (2004) famously proclaimed that "we, the media" captures the shift from one-way communication to participatory networks. Citizen journalism encompasses practices where individuals without formal training produce and disseminate news, often challenging traditional media narratives (Allan, 2013).

In democratic theory, such participation represents a revitalization of the public sphere (Couldry, 2012). However, critics warn that it also dilutes professional norms and opens the door to misinformation (Hermida, 2016). In South Asia, citizen journalism has played dual roles—empowering marginalized voices and exposing power abuses, while also enabling populist sensationalism and rumor proliferation (Uddin, 2021; Shah, 2020).

In Bangladesh, citizen reporters using selfie sticks have documented corruption, police violence, and natural disasters, gaining viral traction on Facebook and YouTube. Yet, many have faced harassment or arrest under the *Digital Security Act*, reflecting the precarious balance between empowerment and suppression (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Scholars have noted that the boundary between citizen and professional journalism increasingly depends on recognition rather than skill. Carlson (2015) conceptualizes this as a "boundary work" process—journalists constantly redraw professional lines to maintain legitimacy against external challengers. The selfie stick thus becomes a contested symbol: professionals deride it as trivial, while digital natives embrace it as authentic.

Participatory cultures (Jenkins, 2006) further complicate this dynamic. The audience is no longer passive but contributes to news verification, interpretation, and circulation. Livestream comments, hashtags, and user-generated content reshape the temporality and epistemology of journalism. This "networked witnessing" (Mortensen, 2015) alters the ethics of representation, where authenticity is co-produced between reporter and audience.

In Bangladesh's context, selfie journalism thrives precisely because audiences crave direct connection and emotional immediacy amid declining trust in mainstream institutions.

2.5. The Professional Identity Crisis: Symbolic Capital and Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) theory of the journalistic field provides a powerful lens to interpret the current identity crisis. According to Bourdieu, professions like journalism operate as structured spaces of competition for symbolic capital—prestige, authority, and credibility. Entry into the field is regulated through training, institutional affiliation, and ethical codes. However, digital technologies have disrupted these mechanisms, allowing outsiders to accumulate alternative forms of capital—attention capital (Marwick, 2015) and platform capital (van Dijck et al., 2018).

Professional journalists often perceive this as an invasion of amateurs, while digital creators see it as democratization. The resulting identity crisis is both epistemic and emotional. As Zelizer (2019) argues, journalism's legitimacy depends not merely on accuracy but on its social performance of authority—the ability to claim "I was there." In selfie stick journalism, that claim becomes literally embodied, as reporters insert themselves into the frame.

Research on digital labor (Scholz, 2017) also highlights the precarious conditions under which new journalists operate: freelancing, algorithmic dependence, and self-branding pressures. These conditions mirror broader neoliberal transformations in media economies, where individuals must "market themselves" as entrepreneurial journalists (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). The selfie stick, as a symbol, encapsulates this entrepreneurial turn—journalists managing their own production, distribution, and promotion.

In Bangladesh and across South Asia, where formal journalism education and union protections remain limited, the symbolic capital of traditional journalism is declining. Younger practitioners find legitimacy through engagement metrics, followers, and platform partnerships rather than editorial endorsement (Rahman, 2022).

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Theoretical debates thus converge on a key point: professionalism is no longer defined by institutional belonging, but by networked recognition. The identity of the journalist becomes fluid, negotiated, and contingent upon visibility.

2.6. Algorithms, Attention, and Platform Capitalism

The digital news environment is increasingly shaped by algorithmic governance. Algorithms determine which stories gain visibility, which reporters trend, and which narratives dominate public attention (Gillespie, 2018; Napoli, 2019). Journalists now operate within a system of "algorithmic gatekeeping", where the logic of engagement replaces the logic of public service.

For selfie stick journalists, this has dual implications. On one hand, algorithms can amplify marginalized voices—boosting viral livestreams from citizen reporters during crises. On the other, they incentivize sensationalism, emotional expression, and visual dramatization—traits that align with platform profitability but not necessarily with journalistic ethics (Tufekci, 2015).

Zuboff's (2019) concept of surveillance capitalism further illuminates the structural dynamics: platforms commodify user behavior, turning journalistic labor into data flows for targeted advertising. Consequently, both professional and amateur journalists become subjects of algorithmic control, competing for attention within opaque systems.

In South Asia, where Facebook serves as the primary gateway to news, platform dependency is especially acute (Rao, 2022). Bangladeshi journalists, for instance, rely heavily on Facebook Live due to its wide reach, but this dependence subjects them to unpredictable algorithmic shifts and content moderation biases. The platform's policies on "misinformation" or "community standards" often intersect with state censorship, constraining journalistic autonomy (Islam, 2023).

Algorithmic visibility thus becomes a new form of capital. As Bishop (2020) notes, "visibility labor" defines success in digital economies, compelling creators to continuously optimize content for engagement. Selfie stick journalists exemplify this dynamic—performing authenticity to satisfy algorithmic criteria while negotiating the ethics of truth-telling.

2.7. South Asian Media Transformations: Bangladesh in Focus

The South Asian region exhibits unique characteristics in its media evolution: rapid digital adoption, low trust in traditional institutions, and strong state influence over press freedom. Comparative studies show that South Asian journalists often navigate between institutional fragility and digital populism (Banaji, 2021; Rao, 2022).

In Bangladesh, the intersection of media liberalization, authoritarian resurgence, and digital expansion has produced a paradoxical media ecology. While the number of outlets has increased, editorial independence has weakened due to political and economic pressures (Islam, 2016). In this vacuum, social media has emerged as an alternative sphere of information exchange.

Citizen journalists and vloggers play critical roles during national crises. During the 2024 student protests and subsequent unrest, dozens of livestreamers documented state violence when mainstream outlets were silenced. Their videos, often shot with selfie sticks, circulated globally, challenging official narratives. However, many faced state backlash and online harassment.

Kabir and Nasrin (2021) observe that "mobile journalism has become the default mode of news production for young Bangladeshi reporters who must navigate both technological and political precarity" (p. 150). This precarity reflects larger regional patterns—similar dynamics in India (Pathak, 2020) and Pakistan (Shah, 2020) illustrate how digital reporters balance visibility with vulnerability.

The symbolic politics of the selfie stick reveal deeper questions of class and legitimacy. Traditional journalists, often urban and middle-class, view it as a populist intrusion, whereas rural youth perceive it as liberation from elitist newsroom cultures. The result is a fragmented media field where multiple definitions of journalism coexist—professional, populist, activist, and entrepreneurial.

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2.8. Gender and Generational Dimensions

Gender and generation intersect significantly in the selfie journalism phenomenon. Studies on digital media in South Asia reveal that mobile technologies have opened new spaces for women journalists who were previously marginalized within patriarchal newsroom structures (Banaji, 2021; Ahmed, 2023). The portability of the selfie stick allows women to report independently in contexts where mobility and safety remain concerns.

At the same time, online harassment and gendered surveillance impose constraints. Female vloggers and reporters in Bangladesh frequently face trolling, doxing, and moral policing (Nasrin & Parvin, 2022). The visibility that brings recognition also exposes them to violence.

Generationally, the divide between "legacy" and "digital-born" journalists is stark. Older professionals lament the decline of editorial discipline, while younger practitioners embrace immediacy and affective storytelling as forms of truth (Rahman, 2022). This generational clash reflects differing epistemologies: print-trained journalists privilege verification and objectivity, while digital natives value connectivity and experiential authenticity.

The selfie sticks, therefore, symbolizes a generational rebellion—a tool of youthful assertion in a hierarchical profession resistant to change. Yet, as Ahmed (2023) notes, this rebellion is constrained by the same patriarchal and algorithmic systems it seeks to challenge.

2.9. Ethical and Epistemological Implications

The rise of selfie stick journalism raises crucial ethical questions. If anyone with a smartphone can be a journalist, who ensures accuracy, accountability, and fairness? As Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) assert, journalism's core purpose is to provide citizens with reliable information for self-governance. Yet, in algorithmic ecosystems, reliability competes with virality.

Selfie journalism privileges presence over process—the immediacy of being there often outweighs the rigor of verification. While this fosters transparency, it also risks epistemic populism, where truth is determined by audience emotion rather than factual consistency.

The problem is not the technology itself but the erosion of collective professional norms. Digital journalists operate individually, often without editorial oversight or fact-checking support. As Carlson (2018) warns, this fragmentation undermines journalism's credibility as a social institution.

In Bangladesh, these challenges are compounded by legal constraints and state surveillance. The *Digital Security Act* criminalizes "false information," but its vague wording allows political misuse against dissenting voices. This legal precarity forces journalists to self-censor or migrate to informal platforms—further blurring the line between professional and citizen journalism (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Ethical journalism in the selfie era thus requires rethinking not only individual responsibility but also collective infrastructures of trust—education, policy, and platform accountability.

2.10. Summary: Theoretical Convergence and Research Gap

The literature converges on three core insights.

First, digital and mobile technologies have transformed journalism from an institutional profession into a networked practice of self-representation.

Second, this transformation has produced an identity crisis where legitimacy is negotiated through visibility, algorithmic performance, and audience recognition.

Third, South Asia—especially Bangladesh—provides a critical empirical site where these transformations intersect with political repression, youth culture, and platform capitalism.

Despite growing scholarship on digital journalism, few studies have explicitly examined the symbolic and performative dimensions of tools like the selfie stick as both technological artifacts and identity markers. The concept of "selfie stick journalism" remains under-theorized in academic discourse, particularly from the Global South perspective.

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This study addresses that gap by integrating field theory, network society, and algorithmic governance frameworks to analyze how journalists in Bangladesh and South Asia reconstruct professional identity within digital ecologies. It builds upon and extends prior research (Deuze, 2005; Banaji, 2021; Rahman, 2022) to propose that selfie stick journalism is not merely a trend but a structural symptom of journalism's post-professional condition.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative and critical research design rooted in interpretivist and constructivist paradigms. It assumes that media practices, particularly those emerging around "selfie stick journalism," are socially constructed phenomena shaped by discourse, power, and technology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The aim is not to quantify journalistic identities but to interpret the symbolic meanings, struggles, and negotiations that define who counts as a journalist in the algorithmic and participatory media ecosystem of Bangladesh and South Asia.

The critical orientation of this research draws upon cultural studies, critical media theory, and postcolonial perspectives to interrogate how journalistic legitimacy is produced, contested, and mediated through technological artifacts such as smartphones, selfie sticks, and live-streaming platforms (Couldry, 2012; Fuchs, 2020). This approach allows exploration of how class, gender, institutional access, and digital literacy intersect in shaping journalistic identity within the region's evolving media landscape.

Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate here because it seeks depth over breadth, emphasizing contextual interpretation of lived experience and symbolic communication (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given that the phenomenon of selfie stick journalism involves visual performance, affective self-presentation, and digital labor, the chosen design enables nuanced understanding of the socio-technical identity crisis facing both professional journalists and self-styled digital storytellers.

3.2. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following central and subsidiary research questions:

1. **Central Question:**
   How does selfie stick journalism redefine the professional identity and legitimacy of journalists in Bangladesh and South Asia?
2. **Sub-questions:**
   a. How do journalists and citizen content creators negotiate authority and authenticity in a social media–dominated environment?
   b. What discourses emerge in media narratives, interviews, and online platforms that blur the boundary between "professional" and "performative" journalism?
   c. How do gender, technology, and institutional constraints shape the identity politics of journalism in Bangladesh and South Asia?

These questions are exploratory rather than predictive, reflecting the **constructivist nature** of the research, where understanding is co-created through interaction between researcher, participant, and text.

3.3. Data Sources and Sampling

The study employs a multi-source data strategy to ensure triangulation and validity across different communicative and discursive domains (Patton, 2015). Three primary data sources are used:

1. **Textual Materials:**
   - News articles, video reports, live streams, and photojournalism from mainstream Bangladeshi and South Asian media (e.g., *Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, NDTV, The Hindu, Geo News*).

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- Social media posts, YouTube vlogs, and Facebook Live sessions by "selfie journalists" or "mobile journalists" (MOJOs).
- Policy and institutional documents from press councils and journalist associations.

2. **Semi-Structured Interviews:**
   - 25 participants, including 10 professional journalists (from television, print, and online media), 10 digital content creators'/selfie journalists, and 5 media educators or regulators.
   - Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on active involvement in digital or mobile journalism in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
   - The diversity of respondents ensured representation of urban and semi-urban voices, varying age groups (22–50 years), and both genders.
3. **Visual and Platform Discourse:**
   - Analysis of user comments, hashtags (#selfiejournalist, #mojoBangladesh, #citizenmedia), and platform engagement metrics (likes, shares, views).
   - Particular focus was placed on coverage of politically sensitive events—such as protests, elections, and floods—where "selfie journalism" became prominent.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted between January and August 2025. The process involved multiple overlapping stages:

- **Stage 1: Desk Research and Textual Curation**

Archival retrieval of online and print materials related to selfie journalism. Media monitoring tools and keyword searches identified approximately 300 relevant news and social media items.

- **Stage 2: Interviews**

Conducted in-person (for Dhaka and Kolkata) and via online platforms (Zoom, WhatsApp, Signal). Interviews were semi-structured, averaging 60 minutes each, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

- **Stage 3: Social Media and Platform Observation**

Digital ethnography techniques (Pink et al., 2016) were used to observe interactions, follower engagement, and visual practices of selected selfie journalists. Observation logs included screenshots, engagement analytics, and contextual notes.

To maintain reflexivity, the researcher kept a field journal documenting positionality and interpretive decisions throughout data collection.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

a. Textual Analysis

Textual analysis focused on media language, framing, and representation. Using Fairclough's (1995) model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study examined how journalistic identity is discursively constructed through lexical choices, visual framing, and narrative style. Texts were coded for recurring themes: *authenticity, immediacy, authority, visibility,* and *professionalism*.

For example, selfie reporters' framing of "I was there" moments was contrasted with traditional newsroom reporting emphasizing verification and institutional authority.

b. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis extended beyond textual features to explore broader ideological and power structures (van Dijk, 2009). It interrogated how terms like *citizen journalist*, *mobile journalist*, or *digital activist* are used to legitimize or marginalize actors. By comparing Bangladeshi and Indian discourses, the analysis traced how professional guilds, political actors, and platforms co-construct legitimacy.

c. Thematic Coding and NVivo Support

All interview transcripts and textual materials were uploaded into **NVivo 14** for qualitative coding. Using inductive and deductive codes, themes such as *self-branding, precarity, gendered visibility,* and *technological empowerment* emerged. Codes were grouped into analytical clusters corresponding to research questions.

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d. Visual and Platform Semiotics

The visual dimension—pose, framing, gaze, background, and digital aesthetics—was analyzed through Barthesian semiotics (Barthes, 1977). The selfie stick itself was treated as a symbolic artifact—a prosthetic extension of both journalist and camera, merging personal expression with public storytelling. Platform affordances (filters, emojis, live reactions) were included as semiotic cues shaping identity and audience perception.

3.6. Validity, Reliability, and Reflexivity

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Triangulation of methods (textual, interview, discourse) strengthened internal validity. Peer debriefing sessions with media scholars from Dhaka University and Jadavpur University helped refine analytical categories.

Researcher reflexivity was maintained through positional awareness of professional background and digital engagement. As the researcher has previously worked in journalism education, continuous reflection was practiced to mitigate interpretive bias (Berger, 2015). All interviewees were anonymized using pseudonyms, and identifiable details were removed to ensure ethical compliance.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Particular attention was paid to digital consent; as social media materials often fall within the "public domain." However, the study adopted an ethical contextualism approach (Markham & Buchanan, 2012), treating user-generated content with care and ensuring no harm or exposure to vulnerable individuals.

3.8. Limitations of the Methodological Approach

While qualitative depth is the strength of this research, several limitations are acknowledged:

- The non-representative sample limits generalizability to all journalists or content creators.
- Access to some professional journalists was constrained by institutional gatekeeping and political sensitivities.
- Platform algorithms constantly evolve, meaning findings represent a specific temporal snapshot.
- Language barriers required selective translation from Bengali and Hindi into English, with potential loss of nuance.

Nevertheless, these constraints are balanced by the study's cross-country comparative scope and multi-method triangulation, offering rich interpretive insights.

3.9. Analytical Framework

The data interpretation is guided by an integrated analytical framework combining:

1. **Bourdieu's Field Theory**—explaining symbolic power and professional capital struggles among journalists (Bourdieu, 1998).
2. **Goffman's Dramaturgical Model**—viewing selfie journalism as performative labor where individuals manage impressions before audiences (Goffman, 1959).
3. **van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis**—examining ideological framing of legitimacy and identity (van Dijk, 2009).
4. **Digital Labor Theory**—highlighting precarity and unpaid affective work within platform capitalism (Fuchs, 2020).

This interdisciplinary lens allows a holistic understanding of journalistic identity as a dynamic intersection of discourse, performance, and technology.

In summary, the methodological framework integrates textual, discursive, and interpretive strategies to unpack the evolving phenomenon of selfie stick journalism. The combination of interviews, discourse analysis, and visual semiotics provides an empirically grounded yet critically reflective understanding of how professional and citizen journalists coexist, clash, and co-define

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modern media ecosystems in Bangladesh and South Asia. This methodology lays the foundation for the next section, which will present empirical findings and analysis through the lenses of identity, professionalism, and technological mediation.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Introduction to Findings

The analysis of qualitative data from interviews, media texts, and social media observations reveals an evolving crisis of professional identity, legitimacy, and symbolic power within journalism in Bangladesh and South Asia. The rise of "selfie stick journalism" (SSJ)—mobile, self-broadcasting, visually performative—signifies more than a technological shift. It represents a cultural and epistemological transformation of journalistic practice, where the line between *citizen witness* and *trained journalist* blurs (Rahman, 2022; Pathak, 2020).

Across all data sources, three overarching themes emerged:

1. **The Collapse of Institutional Boundaries:** Journalistic authority no longer resides exclusively in the newsroom but extends into the street, protest site, or smartphone lens.
2. **The Performance of Authenticity:** Selfie journalists perform authenticity and immediacy through bodily presence and live broadcasting.
3. **The Crisis of Recognition and Precarity:** Professional journalists face insecurity and resentment as audience trust migrates toward digital influencers and mobile journalists.

Each of these themes is explored through sub-sections combining discursive excerpts, interview quotes, and theoretical interpretation.

4.2. Theme 1: The Collapse of Institutional Boundaries

4.2.1. The Dissolution of Gatekeeping

In traditional journalism, the newsroom functioned as both a symbolic and material gatekeeper—filtering news through editorial ethics, verification, and institutional credibility (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). However, with the proliferation of smartphones and social platforms, journalists are now bypassed by *citizen witnesses* broadcasting directly from the field.

An interviewee, **R1**, a television journalist from Dhaka, articulated:

> "Before, you needed a press card and a camera crew to report from a protest. Now, a person with a phone and selfie stick gets more views than us. People call them 'reporters' even when they have no idea about journalistic ethics."

This sentiment echoes a widespread grievance among professional journalists across South Asia. In India, a senior print journalist (**R7**) remarked:

> "Viewership and virality have become the new credentials. Our editorial labor is invisible next to a live-streamer shouting on Facebook."

Such observations suggest the emergence of **"**algorithmic legitimacy**"**—a new form of authority conferred not by institutions but by visibility, engagement, and network amplification (Tufekci, 2015; Gillespie, 2018).

4.2.2". Field Without a Gate": The Bourdieuian Lens

Applying *Bourdieu's field theory*, this boundary collapse represents a *redistribution of symbolic* **capital** within the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 1998). The traditional hierarchy—where professional journalists held *cultural capital* (training, institutional affiliation) and *symbolic capital* (public trust)—is now contested by "digital outsiders" wielding *technological capital* (mobile tools, algorithmic fluency).

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As one Bangladeshi YouTuber (**R12**) stated:

> "I didn't study journalism, but my phone connects me directly to people. They trust me because I'm not part of the corrupt media."

This remark encapsulates the anti-institutional populism that fuels selfie journalism. The institutional gatekeepers are recast as elitist, while the selfie journalist becomes a "people's journalist," empowered by proximity and perceived honesty.

4.2.3. Visual Example: Protest Coverage

A widely circulated *Facebook Live video* from the July 2024 Dhaka student protests demonstrated this shift. A young woman journalist, holding a selfie stick, reports amid tear gas with the caption:

> "We are live, no editing, no censorship—just truth."

The video garnered over 2.2 million views within 24 hours, dwarfing coverage by major networks. Here, authenticity and immediacy replace institutional verification as the currency of credibility. The visual symbolism of *self-holding the camera* signifies both presence and independence—a performative rejection of traditional media mediation.

4.3. Theme 2: The Performance of Authenticity

4.3.1. Selfie as Performance

Drawing upon *Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959***)**, selfie stick journalism functions *as a front-stage performance* where journalists manage impressions before an imagined audience. The "selfie" here is not mere vanity but a strategic self-presentation that fuses *personal vulnerability* and *professional courage*.

A female journalist from Chattogram (**R9**) explained:

> "When I go live, holding the selfie stick, it's not just about reporting—it's about showing I am there, risking myself for truth. That makes viewers connect emotionally."

This emotional immediacy aligns with *affective journalism* (Beckett & Deuze, 2016), where emotion, rather than detachment, becomes a key ingredient of credibility. The embodied act of holding the camera—sweating, crying, shouting—produces what Barthes (1977) calls the *punctum*: the emotional "sting" that pierces the viewer's consciousness.

4.3.2. The Feminization of Visibility

Interestingly, *female selfie journalists* emerged as prominent figures in Bangladesh and India. While facing harassment, they also gain unprecedented autonomy. Visual analysis of Instagram accounts like *@mojobangladesh* and *@streetjournosindia* revealed that over 60% of selfie reporters use the first-person framing "I am showing you what's happening now," emphasizing subjective witnessing.

This personalization subverts the masculine-coded norm of objectivity. As **R14**, a young Indian vlogger, said: "People trust me because I'm emotional. I cry, I get angry. That's real. News should feel real."

Thus, selfie journalism democratizes voice but also re-genders journalistic identity, shifting from institutional detachment to personal presence (Mortensen, 2015; Dutta & Pathak, 2023).

4.3.3. Authenticity as Algorithmic Value

Platforms reward emotional, visual, and live content (Gillespie, 2018). Facebook's algorithm boosts live videos; YouTube favors face-centered frames. Consequently, authenticity becomes not

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only a moral performance but also a platform-optimized strategy. As R3, a Bangladeshi online reporter, noted: "If I show my face, engagement doubles. If I just post facts or voiceover, people scroll past."

This evidences what van Dijck et al. (2018) call "*platformized professionalism*"—where journalistic practices adapt to the logic of metrics and virality. Authenticity is thus *both affective and algorithmic*.

4.4. Theme 3: The Crisis of Recognition and Precarity

4.4.1. Professional Anxiety and Symbolic Devaluation

Many legacy journalists expressed anxiety over being displaced by untrained "content creators." As **R6**, a veteran reporter from *The Daily Star*, lamented:

> "I spent decades learning ethics and verification. Now a kid with a phone is called 'journalist.' What's left of our profession?"

This sentiment reveals a symbolic devaluation of professional norms—accuracy, verification, editorial accountability—that once distinguished journalism from other communicative acts (Zelizer, 2019).

Professional journalists also experience economic precarity, as freelance and digital-first models erode stable employment (Scholz, 2017). Bangladeshi MOJOs often operate without contracts or safety equipment. One respondent described covering street protests with "only a phone and courage," highlighting the material vulnerability accompanying the symbolic shift.

4.4.2. Digital Capitalism and Unpaid Labor

Analysis of social media engagement data reveals that while selfie journalists accumulate visibility, they rarely receive monetary compensation. YouTube monetization remains inconsistent; Facebook's ad policies restrict earnings in South Asia. Thus, the attention economy benefits platforms, not producers (Zuboff, 2019).

A female journalist (**R11**) observed: "We risk our lives for views, but Facebook earns, not us. Still, visibility gives power—it's like unpaid fame."

This aligns with Fuchs's (2020) critique of digital capitalism, where creative labor becomes unpaid affective work. The selfie journalist becomes both *worker and product*—a subject performing visibility for platform profit.

4.4.3. Algorithmic Injustice and Gendered Harassment

Several respondents highlighted online harassment, particularly targeting women who "perform visibility." Hate comments, body shaming, and doxxing were common. A Pakistani MOJO **(R18**) recounted: "The moment I go live from a protest, trolls start saying, 'Go home,' or comment on my looks. But I can't stop—I must be visible to be heard."

Such experiences reveal the double bind of visibility: visibility is empowering yet exposes journalists to gendered violence (Banaji, 2021). Algorithmic amplification often promotes controversial or emotional content, inadvertently magnifying harassment.

This intersectional dimension reinforces how digital identities are politically and bodily contested spaces, especially in conservative South Asian contexts (Islam, 2023).

4.5. Theme 4: Discursive Negotiations of "Who Is a Journalist"

4.5.1. Competing Discourses

The discourse analysis identified three dominant identity framings:

1. **Professional Essentialism:**
   Journalists must have formal training, editorial oversight, and ethical grounding.
   → Example **(R2**): "A selfie does not make you a journalist; facts do."

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2. **Democratic Pluralism:**
   Everyone can report truth if they have access and intent.
   → Example (**R13**): "I'm not from any newsroom, but I show reality live—that's journalism."
3. **Hybrid Pragmatism:**
   Some respondents advocated coexistence: professional ethics with citizen participation.
   → Example (**R5**): "Let institutions train mobile reporters instead of rejecting them."

These competing narratives demonstrate what van Dijk (2009) terms "ideological struggle over discourse ownership." Each position negotiates legitimacy differently: professionals invoke epistemic authority, citizens invoke experiential authenticity, and reformists invoke hybridity.

4.5.2. Textual Illustrations

The linguistic analysis of 30 online news reports and social media posts revealed key framing devices:

- Professional outlets often use derogatory terms: *"so-called journalist," "Facebook reporter."*
- Selfie journalists employ inclusive rhetoric: *"We the people," "truth from the street."*
- Institutional actors (press councils) use regulatory framing: *"unverified," "dangerous reporting."*

The contrast highlights the discursive polarization between elitist exclusion and populist inclusion, mirroring broader political patterns in South Asian media populism (Rao, 2022; Napoli, 2019).

4.6. Theme 5: The Symbolic Power of the Selfie Stick

The selfie stick itself emerged as a recurring symbol across data—a physical and metaphorical tool representing autonomy, reach, and visibility. In semiotic terms, it serves as a prosthetic extension of identity (Barthes, 1977). Holding the stick symbolizes control over one's narrative and camera frame.

A Sri Lankan journalist (**R20**) described: "When I extend my selfie stick, I feel I extend my voice—it's like holding my own microphone against authority."

Photographic and video analysis revealed that many selfie journalists intentionally use low-angle shots, symbolically positioning themselves as both reporter and witness. The stick becomes a democratic weapon—a portable emblem of agency against censorship.

However, professional journalists interpret it differently. One Bangladeshi editor (**R8**) remarked: "The selfie stick is not a microphone—it's a mirror. They're showing themselves, not the truth."

This discursive dichotomy between *mirror* and *microphone* epitomizes the epistemic crisis of contemporary journalism: is journalism about *truth-telling* or *self-showing*?

4.7. Cross-Regional Comparison

Findings reveal nuanced regional differences:

- **Bangladesh:** Selfie journalism thrives in protest movements and disaster reporting. It serves as counter-media amid perceived state censorship (Uddin, 2021).
- **India:** Influencer-journalists dominate YouTube, mixing activism with entertainment (Pathak, 2020).
- **Pakistan:** Citizen journalism is constrained by political and religious censorship (Shah, 2020).
- **Sri Lanka:** Mobile reporting is growing in local-language community journalism projects.

Despite contextual diversity, a common trend persists: the erosion of institutional trust and the individualization of journalistic practice.

4.8. Analytical Synthesis: Identity as Negotiated Performance

Integrating the above findings through the theoretical framework, the identity crisis of journalism in South Asia is both discursive and performative.

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- From Bourdieu's perspective, selfie journalists disrupt the professional field by introducing new capitals (technological and emotional).
- From Goffman's dramaturgical view, journalism becomes a continuous performance of authenticity before a live audience.
- From van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, legitimacy is linguistically and ideologically contested, with competing claims of truth, expertise, and representation.
- From Fuchs's digital labor theory, journalists—both professional and selfie-based—are exploited as unpaid content producers within platform capitalism.

Thus, "who is a journalist" becomes less a definable category than a continuum of performative legitimacy—shaped by algorithms, emotions, and political contexts.

In Bangladesh and South Asia, where digital inequalities persist, selfie stick journalism symbolizes both empowerment and erosion: empowerment through access, and erosion through precarity and misinformation.

The findings reveal that selfie stick journalism embodies the hybridization of media practice in South Asia: a blend of professionalism, populism, and performance. While it democratizes participation, it also destabilizes long-held journalistic norms of verification, ethics, and institutional accountability.

As one respondent summarized: "We are all journalists now—but no one is fully trusted."

This paradox captures the essence of South Asia's media transformation: an expansion of voice alongside a crisis of truth. The following discussion section will further interpret these findings within broader theoretical debates on digital labor, symbolic authority, and the future of journalistic professionalism.

5. Discussion and Interpretation

5.1. Reconsidering Professionalism in the Age of Selfie Journalism

The findings illustrate a deep transformation of professional identity in journalism, where the traditional binaries of journalist vs. non-journalist are collapsing under the pressure of digital participation, mobile technology, and algorithmic performance. In Bangladesh and South Asia, this transformation manifests through the visible rise of "selfie journalists"—individual reporters or citizens who use their smartphones and selfie sticks to broadcast news-like content directly to audiences on Facebook, YouTube, or TikTok.

The conventional definition of a journalist—one associated with institutional employment, editorial supervision, and ethical accountability—is increasingly inadequate to capture these emergent practices. Instead, professionalism is now being redefined as a networked performance of authenticity and immediacy (Deuze, 2019). The performative act of holding the camera toward oneself, often in chaotic street environments or protest zones, signals both presence and personal stake. As one Bangladeshi respondent (a Dhaka-based online journalist) stated:

> "If I show my face while reporting, people trust me more. They feel I'm not hiding behind a studio or script. It's raw, it's risky, it's real."

This sentiment reflects a shift from institutional credibility to affective credibility (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020). Viewers' trust is built through perceived emotional transparency rather than adherence to traditional newsroom standards. Selfie journalists often embody proximity journalism—a practice grounded in visibility, vulnerability, and participation, not professional detachment.

From a theoretical standpoint, Bourdieu's (1998) field theory helps explain this disruption. Journalism as a field has historically been organized around professional capital—defined by education, editorial training, and association membership. Selfie journalism destabilizes that field by democratizing access to the tools of symbolic production. The "field of journalism" expands to include actors without institutional legitimacy but with algorithmic visibility and social capital. In

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other words, digital platforms have become the new gatekeepers, redistributing symbolic power once controlled by editors and media houses.

5.2. Algorithmic Visibility and the New Economy of Credibility

The analysis revealed that algorithmic visibility—the extent to which content is promoted, recommended, or surfaced by platform algorithms—now operates as a proxy for legitimacy. Interviewees consistently emphasized that views, shares, and likes determine whether one is perceived as a "real journalist." One selfie journalist from Chattogram remarked: "If my video reaches a million views, people say, 'She's a journalist.' If it gets ten, they don't. That's the algorithm's certificate." This reflects the rise of an attention-based epistemology (Marwick, 2015), where truth and authority are validated by metrics rather than editorial review. Algorithms act as invisible editors—shaping visibility, defining relevance, and even determining who gets paid through monetization systems (Bucher, 2018).

In Bangladesh, Facebook and YouTube dominate this visibility economy. Many selfie journalists rely on Facebook Live to report breaking events, from protests to flood coverage. The algorithm prioritizes immediacy—live videos and emotional narratives are rewarded with greater reach. Consequently, journalists are incentivized to perform emotion, urgency, and risk. This shift aligns with Papacharissi's (2015) idea of "affective publics," where emotions serve as connective tissue for digital engagement.

However, this algorithmic dependency produces a paradox: while it democratizes visibility, it simultaneously deepens precarity. The same algorithm that elevates a journalist today can suppress them tomorrow. Moreover, it blurs ethical boundaries: the drive for virality often leads to sensationalism or unverified reporting. One senior editor interviewed lamented: "Our young reporters now chase likes more than facts. The algorithm has replaced the editor."

This echoes Fuchs's (2020) critique of digital capitalism—where communicative labor becomes subsumed into platform logics of profit extraction. Selfie journalism, while seemingly empowering, often disguises free digital labor, as creators work without stable pay, safety nets, or institutional protection.

5.3. Media Ethics and the Collapse of Editorial Authority

The findings also revealed that selfie journalism provokes a crisis of ethics and accountability. Professional codes of conduct—accuracy, impartiality, fairness—become ambiguous in decentralized production environments. Many selfie journalists operate independently, without editorial oversight, yet wield significant influence.

This raises a critical question: Who enforces ethics when everyone can be a journalist?

In Bangladesh, the Press Council Code of Conduct (2014) applies only to registered media professionals. Selfie journalists, vloggers, or live streamers exist outside this framework, creating an accountability vacuum. As a result, the ethics of visibility—showing everything immediately—often replaces the ethics of verification. Interview data suggest that some practitioners view "showing live" as inherently truthful, overlooking issues of context, consent, and privacy.

The rise of digital-first news platforms in Dhaka, such as Bdnews24.com and Jagonews24, has blurred lines between citizen and professional content. These outlets frequently re-share social media footage without verifying its source. As a result, rumors, propaganda, and emotional framing infiltrate journalistic spaces.

In South Asia, the problem is amplified by political capture of media ecosystems. In India, for instance, state-sponsored narratives are often amplified through both traditional and digital channels, while independent selfie journalists face trolling or censorship (Ninan, 2021). In Pakistan and Sri Lanka, algorithmic surveillance and digital security laws have been used to suppress dissenting citizen reporters. This regional context reveals that the ethics crisis is not only about misinformation but also about freedom and control—who gets to speak, and who gets silenced.

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5.4. Performance, Persona, and Gendered Visibility

One of the most revealing findings concerns the gendered dimensions of selfie journalism. Female selfie reporters often experience both empowerment and exposure. On the one hand, selfie sticks provide autonomy—allowing women to control their framing, movement, and storytelling in ways historically denied by male-dominated newsrooms. On the other hand, visibility invites harassment, both online and offline.

A young female content creator from Rajshahi explained: "I started covering social issues with my phone. But after my videos went viral, the comments became abusive. They question my clothes, my face, not my story." This demonstrates the gendered politics of digital visibility, where self-representation becomes a site of both empowerment and vulnerability (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The "selfie" as a feminist act of presence—reclaiming the right to be seen—is simultaneously an act of exposure in patriarchal digital cultures.

Furthermore, the affective labor demanded by algorithms disproportionately affects women. To remain visible, they must perform constant emotional authenticity—smiling, empathizing, engaging with comments. This emotional performance mirrors the broader neoliberal expectation of self-branding (Gill, 2016), where journalists become micro-entrepreneurs of their own visibility.

In Bangladesh and South Asia, where cultural conservatism intersects with rapid digitalization, the gendered self-presentation of journalists thus becomes a terrain of negotiation—between safety, professionalism, and self-expression.

5.5. The Crisis of Authority: From Gatekeeping to Gatewatching

Traditional journalism operated on a gatekeeping model (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009): editors decided what was newsworthy. Selfie journalism, in contrast, operates on gatewatching (Bruns, 2018): everyone can monitor, share, and comment on the news.

This transition represents a reconfiguration of epistemic authority. In Dhaka's digital environment, journalists no longer hold a monopoly over news-making. Citizen footage often precedes professional reporting—especially during crises such as floods, protests, or political unrest. As one senior television reporter admitted: "By the time we reach the scene, Facebook is already full of videos. We end up quoting them."

Such practices mark a decentralization of news epistemology—what counts as knowledge and who counts as a knower. The authority once tied to institutional journalism is now distributed across networked publics (Hermida, 2016). Yet, this democratization is uneven. Algorithms, language hierarchies, and political pressures filter whose voices gain traction.

In the South Asian context, the vernacularization of journalism—using Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and Tamil—expands participation but also complicates verification. Localized digital publics create micro-spheres of discourse, where alternative narratives flourish outside elite media channels. This pluralization of voices, while enriching, challenges cohesive ethical frameworks and undermines collective trust in journalism as a field.

5.6. Theoretical Integration: Identity as Performance and Capital

Integrating these findings with theory reveals that journalistic identity is no longer a fixed professional category but a fluid performance negotiated across platforms.

From Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective, selfie journalists perform front-stage acts of credibility and authenticity before digital audiences. The camera becomes both mirror and mediator—enabling self-presentation that fuses intimacy and authority.

From Bourdieu's (1998) field theory, this performative labor can be seen as a struggle for symbolic capital. Institutional journalists still possess credential capital (degrees, newsroom affiliation), while selfie journalists accumulate visibility capital (followers, metrics). Both forms coexist and compete, revealing a hybridized field where algorithmic value often outweighs institutional validation.

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From Couldry's (2012) standpoint, the crisis reflects a deeper transformation in the mediation of reality. The media no longer merely report events—they constitute the reality through visible self-performance. The "selfie" becomes epistemological: to show is to know. This has profound implications for truth production in digital societies.

5.7. South Asian Context: Structural Precarity and Postcolonial Media Logics

In interpreting these dynamics regionally, it is essential to situate selfie journalism within postcolonial and neoliberal trajectories of South Asian media. Journalism in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka evolved within state-controlled or politically aligned systems. Professional identity has historically been linked to nation-building and elite gatekeeping.

The arrival of social media disrupted this model, allowing marginalized voices—rural youth, women, informal workers—to participate in news production. Yet, as scholars argue (Thussu, 2018; Udupa, 2021), this participation unfolds under structural precarity: lack of financial stability, state surveillance, and algorithmic opacity.

In Bangladesh, the Digital Security Act (2018) created a chilling effect, deterring both journalists and citizen reporters. The result is a contradictory environment: digital freedom coexists with digital fear. Selfie journalists, while appearing independent, navigate a regime of self-censorship, aware that visibility can invite repression.

Thus, the identity crisis of journalists in South Asia is not merely professional but political—reflecting tensions between expression and control, autonomy and dependency, visibility and vulnerability. It demonstrates how global platform capitalism intersects with local authoritarianism, reshaping what it means to "speak truth to power."

5.8. Ethics, Authenticity, and the Future of Journalism

The ethical questions raised by selfie journalism invite a rethinking of what constitutes responsible reporting in networked societies. Rather than lamenting the erosion of professionalism, scholars like Carlson and Lewis (2019) argue for a reconfiguration of journalistic authority—one that acknowledges hybridity, participation, and transparency.

In Bangladesh and South Asia, this means developing inclusive ethics frameworks that recognize diverse actors while preserving accountability. Emerging media literacy initiatives, journalist associations, and platform collaborations can play vital roles. Universities and press councils should incorporate digital ethics, verification training, and gender sensitivity into journalism education.

Moreover, there is a need to shift from defensive professionalism (protecting boundaries) to reflexive professionalism (redefining values). As Deuze (2019) notes, journalism's future lies not in its institutional walls but in its capacity to adapt ethically to new communicative environments.

Selfie journalism, despite its controversies, embodies an important democratizing impulse—reclaiming the right to witness, narrate, and represent one's community. Its challenge to institutional journalism can be productive if it leads to more inclusive, participatory models of storytelling.

Ultimately, the findings and theoretical interpretations converge on a central insight: journalistic identity in Bangladesh and South Asia is in a state of fluid transition. The boundaries between professional and citizen, journalist and influencer, authenticity and performance, are being redrawn daily by algorithms, audiences, and affective economies.

Selfie stick journalism exemplifies this transformation—a practice that is simultaneously empowering, exploitative, authentic, and ambiguous. It destabilizes hierarchies but introduces new dependencies. It amplifies marginalized voices but commodifies emotional labor. It blurs ethics but expands participation.

In this hybrid media ecology, identity is no longer something one possesses ("I am a journalist") but something one performs and negotiates ("I become a journalist through visibility"). The challenge for the future lies not in restoring old certainties but in constructing new forms of collective credibility grounded in transparency, inclusivity, and public trust.

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6. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

6.1. Revisiting the Selfie Sticks Phenomenon: A Synthesis of Insights

The phenomenon of "selfie sticks journalism" encapsulates a profound shift in the epistemology of news production in South Asia, particularly in Bangladesh. The smartphone and selfie stick, once seen as mere accessories, have evolved into instruments of news creation, public testimony, and performative presence. The digital turn has democratized journalism, opening spaces for voices historically excluded from mainstream media. Yet, it has also produced a crisis of legitimacy, professionalism, and ethical coherence. The boundary between "journalist" and "non-journalist" is no longer institutional but algorithmic—determined by visibility metrics, virality, and the capacity to narrate oneself in digital space (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Carlson, 2017).

The findings of this study suggest that Bangladeshi and South Asian journalism is caught in an interstitial moment—between traditional newsroom hierarchies and the participatory affordances of mobile technology. Professional journalists, trained in objectivity and verification, now find themselves competing with social media influencers, citizen reporters, and digital activists who often command greater audience trust and engagement. This shift challenges both the ontological and moral foundations of journalism: who speaks for the public, who curates the truth, and who bears accountability for misinformation and manipulation (Deuze & Witschge, 2018; Hermida, 2020).

In Bangladesh, this crisis is particularly acute. The proliferation of mobile-based reporting during the 2024 student protests and the subsequent unrest illustrated both the emancipatory and destabilizing potentials of "selfie sticks journalism." On one hand, it allowed for immediate, unfiltered coverage of state violence and public resistance; on the other, it blurred the line between advocacy, rumor, and emotional performance. The implications for democratic communication are profound: authority has become dispersed, and legitimacy is contingent upon visibility, affect, and algorithmic amplification (Rahman & Ullah, 2023).

6.2. Theoretical Implications: Reconfiguring Professionalism and Ethics

The identity crisis of journalists in the selfie-stick era invites rethinking of professional boundaries through a post-traditional and relational lens. Journalism can no longer be conceptualized solely as an occupation anchored in institutional validation; rather, it must be understood as a networked practice of witnessing and verification (Anderson, 2019). Professionalism in this new ecology is constructed through hybrid performances—where self-branding, emotional storytelling, and technological fluency coexist with traditional ethics of accuracy and accountability.

The study's findings affirm that journalistic identity in South Asia is shaped by three interlocking forces:

1. Technological Mediation: Mobile and algorithmic systems determine who gets seen and heard, privileging certain aesthetics and narratives.
2. Cultural Capital: Professional journalists draw upon formal training and institutional prestige, while citizen reporters leverage authenticity, immediacy, and affective connection.
3. Political Context: In semi-authoritarian contexts like Bangladesh, self-censorship, surveillance, and platform manipulation complicate journalistic autonomy.

Therefore, the redefinition of professionalism must acknowledge not only new technologies but also power asymmetries—between platform algorithms and users, between metropolitan and rural voices, and between state narratives and counter-public testimonies (Fenton, 2020; Poell & van Dijck, 2018).

Ethical challenges also emerge from this reconfiguration. The ease of live streaming, editing, and circulation invites moral hazards: staged suffering, selective editing, and performative empathy. Yet, the solution cannot be a nostalgic return to gatekeeping. Instead, ethics must evolve toward participatory responsibility—where both professional and citizen journalists share norms of transparency, source verification, and harm minimization (Ward, 2018). Journalism education in

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Bangladesh and South Asia thus faces a dual imperative: cultivating digital literacy and restoring moral reflexivity.

6.3. Toward a Policy Framework for Journalism Education

The transformation of journalism demands a systemic response from educational institutions. Journalism curricula in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka often remain rooted in 20th-century paradigms of print and broadcast. To bridge the gap between practice and pedagogy, three core reforms are essential:

1. Integration of Mobile and Algorithmic Literacy:

Courses must train students not only to report but also to navigate algorithmic ecosystems. Understanding platform logics—how virality is engineered, how metrics shape credibility, and how data is commodified—is now essential (Lewis & Westlund, 2015). A practical course on "Mobile and Citizen Journalism" should include ethical frameworks for live reporting, community engagement, and misinformation detection.

2. Hybrid Pedagogies of Authenticity and Accountability:

Journalism education must balance creativity and criticality. Students should be encouraged to experiment with selfie-stick reporting and narrative innovation while grounding these practices in verification, contextualization, and fairness. Ethics should be reframed as dialogical—negotiated between reporter, audience, and platform.

3. Partnerships with Technology and Civil Society Organizations:

Journalism schools can form collaborative hubs with tech companies, fact-checking NGOs, and community reporters to foster interdisciplinary learning. This would enable students to critically engage with both the affordances and dangers of digital tools (Kumar & Thomas, 2021).

In Bangladesh, institutions such as Dhaka University's Department of Mass Communication and Journalism or BRAC University's School of Humanities and Social Sciences could pioneer such models by developing Digital Journalism Labs where academic research meets civic innovation.

6.4. Media Policy and Platform Governance in South Asia

Policy interventions must address the systemic conditions enabling the professional crisis. South Asian states often oscillate between suppression and neglect: either over-regulating digital content through draconian laws or failing to ensure accountability for misinformation and online harassment. A balanced approach is needed—one that safeguards freedom while enforcing ethical and algorithmic transparency.

6.4.1. Strengthening Media Independence and Digital Rights

Governments must reform laws such as Bangladesh's Digital Security Act (2018) and India's Information Technology Rules (2021) to prevent their misuse against journalists. Instead of punitive regulation, states should invest in independent media councils that oversee content ethics through peer review rather than surveillance (Islam & Ahmed, 2022). Regional cooperation, through BIMSTEC, could foster shared standards on digital rights and journalist safety.

6.4.2. Regulating Platform Algorithms

Social media platforms operating in South Asia—Facebook, YouTube, TikTok—must be compelled to disclose their moderation policies and algorithmic ranking systems. Public transparency reports, independent audits, and multilingual fact-checking networks should be institutionalized. In Bangladesh, the government can collaborate with academic researchers and digital rights groups to establish a National Digital Ethics Observatory that monitors disinformation trends and algorithmic biases (Islam & Uddin, 2023).

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6.4.3. Supporting Local and Community Journalism

Policy frameworks should promote sustainability for local and community-based journalism through grants, tax incentives, and public service media initiatives. As "selfie sticks journalism" has shown, citizens often fill the vacuum left by collapsing local newsrooms. Institutionalizing support for such grassroots reporting can turn disruption into democratic renewal (Couldry, 2019).

6.5. The South Asian Dimension: Regional Convergences and Divergences

While Bangladesh represents a vivid case of digital journalism's volatility, similar tensions resonate across South Asia. In India, the explosion of "stringer" networks and YouTube news channels has challenged legacy broadcasters. In Pakistan, citizen journalists on TikTok and Twitter often outpace traditional outlets in covering protests or state repression. In Nepal and Sri Lanka, mobile-based environmental reporting has democratized access but also magnified sensationalism.

Despite national variations, a shared pattern emerges: the collapse of gatekeeping and the rise of performative visibility. Journalism across the region now operates under algorithmic logics that reward emotionality over evidence, speed over accuracy, and individualism over institutional accountability. This convergence calls for a regional epistemic dialogue—a South Asian Charter on Digital Journalism Ethics—that aligns professional standards with local cultural realities and technological transformations (Thussu, 2020; Rahman & Das, 2024).

6.6. A Framework for the Future: From Crisis to Coexistence

The selfie-stick journalist is not the enemy of professional journalism but its mirror—reflecting both its democratization and its disorientation. The task ahead is not to exclude, but to cohabit: to create a media ecology where institutional and individual truth-telling can coexist, interact, and co-regulate. This requires:

- Reconceptualizing Journalism as a Commons: Treat information as a shared resource, sustained by collective norms of care, not private competition.
- Embedding Reflexive Ethics: Encourage journalists to reflect continuously on their role, bias, and digital footprint.
- Building Cross-generational Solidarity: Facilitate dialogue between veteran journalists and new media practitioners to co-develop professional ethics that adapt to change without erasing tradition.

Ultimately, the identity crisis is an opportunity for reinvention. The selfie stick, symbol of vanity and immediacy, can also be reclaimed as a tool of empathy and empowerment. Journalism in Bangladesh and South Asia stands at a crossroads: between spectacle and substance, virality and veracity, crisis and creativity. The direction chosen will define not only the future of journalism but the moral architecture of public discourse itself.

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