# The Solo Broadcast Journalism Practices from an Industry Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Social networking is a rapidly growing source of news in broadcast journalism. Broadcast journalism is facing a continuing decline in electronic media circulation and social media changes. The concept of online convergence in broadcast journalism has become a news trend on social media. Solo broadcast journalism and social media are becoming practices in news organisations today. Therefore, this article aims to identify the practices of solo broadcast journalism from an industry practitioner's perspective. A qualitative methodological approach was used in this study. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with eight informants who practised solo broadcast journalism. The data were analysed thematically. The results showed that production tasks, location reviews, good time management, relationships with the community, preparation tasks, and comfortable places are among the concepts of practising solo broadcast journalism in news organisations. The findings of this study show that journalists practice solo broadcast journalism to get news in line with the development of digital media today. The findings of this study are expected to benefit the National ICT Agenda on National Broadband Policy from the perspective of newspaper organisations in expanding the use of technology in the distribution and publication of stories for news. The findings of this study will help make appropriate adjustments to develop human capital by integrating broadcast journalism practices with technology-assisted work in solo broadcast journalism. In addition, this study is also significant to the National Education Policy. The study will impact the educational curriculum of broadcast journalism by introducing changes in line with the development of solo broadcast journalism.

**Keywords:** *Practice, solo broadcast journalism, industry practitioner, Industrial Revolution 4.0, social media.*

## INTRODUCTION

Social networking is a rapidly growing source of news in broadcast journalism. Broadcast journalism is facing a continuing decline in electronic media circulation and social media changes. The concept of online convergence broadcast journalism has become a news trend in social media. According to Deuze (2004), the Internet is the main channel for news broadcast journalism due to its convergence purposes. Often, broadcast journalists write text-based stories for websites and include graphic and audio-visual elements in the stories produced. This way,

websites become more interactive, and viewers can know more stories, refer to articles, and express their views. The convergence of technology makes newsrooms work with other media to stay afloat in the industry.

This era of media convergence is making organisations change the management of news institutions. Lowrey and Woo (2010) adopted the institutional theory to explain the practice of online and audience research by newspaper organisations. Newspapers practice the classic "decoupling". For example, audience input monitoring is under the news editor. Despite practising nominal audience research, news organisations submit part of the news production job, i.e. from actual news decisions made by editors and journalists and the status quo in news organisations management (Lowrey, 2011; Lowrey & Woo, 2010). Gade (2004) stated that news organisations abandon the practice of newsroom personnel and Lowrey (2005) agreed that news sharing within the news organisation.

The convergent media indirectly changes the work of broadcast journalists who work individually also known as solo broadcast journalism. Literature has limitedly described solo broadcast journalism, whereas past studies have only used the phrase solo journalists. Several terms in previous studies have been used to describe solo journalists. In this analysis, solo journalists are described as individuals who are categorised as professional news (the job of a solo journalist is an individual who works professionally to produce news) who are responsible for gathering information, writing stories, recording the audio and video elements needed for a story, and editing the elements together. In television news shows, traditional 'news crews' are journalists who gather information and write scripts, while videographers record audio-visual story elements, and act as video editors (Tuggle, Carr, & Huffman, 2014). These solo journalists are multimedia journalists (or MMJs), video journalists, mobile journalists, backpack journalists, and, "one-person groups." The term solo journalist was chosen because work design is singular in news work (Bock, 2012).

The advent of solo broadcast journalism in the digital era presents a duality of opportunities and challenges. As highlighted by Zuraidah and Syamimi (2023), the accessibility of technology enables almost anyone to become a journalist, from utilising email to navigating social media. While this democratisation empowers individuals to share information, it accentuates the importance of media accountability. Maintaining accuracy, fairness, and ethical standards becomes imperative in an environment where news circulates widely across digital platforms. Solo broadcasters must uphold accountability by rigorously verifying sources, fact-checking information, and ensuring transparency in their reporting. Operating independently, they shoulder a heightened responsibility to adhere to professional standards and ethical guidelines, as their content can reach vast audiences without editorial oversight. Thus, within solo broadcast journalism, media accountability remains pivotal for safeguarding trust, credibility, and integrity in news and information dissemination.

Therefore, this study uses the theory of media accountability. Media accountability refers to the notion that the media prioritises the public interest and has social responsibility toward them. According to McQuail (2010), the media should consider the quality, means and consequences of their publishing activities to the general public and influenced by other interests. The media can be held accountable by the community or individuals for the quality of their performance. This theory is used to test the practices of solo broadcast journalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Statista (Watson, 2018), the number of journalists in the United States increased to 32,900 in 2015, compared to an estimated number of almost 10,000 journalists available in 2010. Besides that, the existence of mobile phones and tablets has caused journalists to switch to this technology for faster news credibility. Based on a survey in 2017, The Huffington Post found that 47 per cent of the respondents claimed the agency was a reliable news source. The Huffington Post, for example, competed with traditional newspapers in 2017, and a survey showed that 47 per cent of respondents found the source very reliable. As a result, journalists use social media every day. In 2016, more than 80 per cent of journalists used social networking sites like Facebook to help them publish and promote their stories, while more than 53 per cent used micro-blogs such as Twitter for information collection and dissemination (Watson, 2018). In essence, social media has changed the journalists' way of working and using social media. With the development of social media, broadcast journalists are mostly self-employed, and technology is used to publish news.

Today's broadcasters and journalists move solo to disseminate news. Sharing the news on social media has become a necessity for solo journalists. Olmstead, Mitchell, and Rosenstiel (2011) stated that finding news is the most important development in the last decade, but after this, sharing news is probably among the most important. News sharing has become a necessity on social media. News organisations today have practised news publishing on social media by sharing news and information on social media platforms. The rise in the number of journalists with social media editor titles indicates that news organisations are thinking about social media strategically and taking it seriously (Sreenivasan, 2010). Even news sharing changes the way audiences engage with news. The behaviour of individuals sharing news can increase audience participation and interest in news topics (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2015). Observations of other people's news-sharing activities lead to more (unintentional) news exposure and the submission of various opinions and ideas.

News organisations use social media to engage or attract audiences to read or watch news on social media. Miller (2012), through an Associated Press Media Editors survey, stated that 97 per cent of respondents use social media to increase their audience, while 92 per cent use social media to connect with the audience. According to Wadbring and Odmark (2016), liking and commenting on news on the Internet happens to the digital audience. This is also a method to bring the audience closer to the news on social media.

While social media allows for more interaction with audiences, editors argue that the value of traditional journalism should remain the essence of social media use. Research has shown that 69 per cent of editorial-level verification before posting or sharing information is considered good practice (Bullard, 2013). This also includes editors using a conversational tone on Facebook and Twitter (69%), posting questions to provoke discussions on Facebook and Twitter (69%), changing the newsroom culture to embrace social media (59%), training staff to use social media (54%), developing a personality on Facebook and Twitter (52%), avoiding reliance on automatic posts (51%), and using different social media channels for various kinds of content (50%) as the best practices.

Tanner et al. (2013) stated that the reality of the journalism profession is that not all employers are looking for similar skills in potential workers. The skills of journalist trainers are needed according to the organisation's needs. All university journalism programs have formed the core of technical-based courses and meet the needs of the news industry. The journalism industry requires journalists to have strong general knowledge, the right skills, and an interest in the field, as well as the ability to adapt, learn, and possess specialised knowledge (Yusof, Ismail, Ismail, Aripin, Kassim, & Ishak, 2018). Furthermore, rapid technological changes have given rise to new challenges for the journalism profession (Martin, 2008; Kraeplin & Criado, 2005). It requires managing skills and using social media among journalists (Berger, 2009; Melki, Fromm, & Mihailidis, 2013).

The emergence of blogs, social media, and mobile media has challenged news production, traditional business models, and the true definition of 'solo broadcast journalism' in the context of the new media. Online media has built global news links and set up a network of professional journalists, citizen journalists, and digital audiences beyond the boundaries of the Internet. The interactive nature of Web 2.0 and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, MySpace, and Bebo have incorporated convergence technologies with other technology tools such as mobile phones. The development of this technology has raised issues such as the professional identity of journalists (Singer, 2003), changes in journalism ethics (Ess, 2020; Singer, 2003), a new media environment in political news (Freedman, 2010), and the relationship between new media and democracy (Fenton, 2010). Social media development has also impacted news organisations by restructuring the digital news content and attracting the attention of digital audiences (Newman et al., 2017; Bullard, 2013; Gordon, 2003; Quinn, 2005), as well as improving cyber security in digital news content (McGregor et al., 2015; McNevin, 2017).

Solo broadcast journalists thrive in environments where media operate around the clock or engage closely with audiences on social media or news portals, necessitating real-time news delivery. However, media companies like Utusan Malaysia serve as stark examples of failure when they neglected technology adoption, unable to compete in the digital landscape (Zuraidah & Syamimi, 2023; Firdaus, 2019). As technology proliferates in Malaysia, individuals must embrace and adapt to new tools, particularly mobile technologies, to remain relevant. Yet, solo journalists face challenges in continuously learning new technologies to advance their skills and career prospects (Collins & Halverson, 2010; Salzmann et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, Zuraidah and Syamimi (2023) highlight the evolving role of journalists, encompassing tasks beyond traditional reporting to include live interviews, video recording, and editing. This shift towards solo broadcast journalism is echoed by Suhaimi (2021) during his keynote speech at the International Conference on Media Studies 2021 (ICMS'21), emphasising the need for news media to adapt to changing practices.

However, not all experts share this sentiment. Zaki (2021, cited in Zuraidah & Syamimi, 2023), an educator and practitioner in media production, argues against solo broadcast journalism, citing concerns about maintaining quality in various media productions such as dramas, movies, and documentaries. This scepticism echoes past debates, with researchers like Stone (2002) and Penniman (2009) questioning the ability of solo journalists to uphold production standards and storytelling prowess.

Despite these reservations, social media consumers seem more forgiving of production quality (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2014). However, mainstream media outlets are expected to deliver high-quality content with superior aesthetics. This underscores the importance of prioritising quality among news companies in news publishing, particularly in diverse situations where audience expectations vary.

In solo broadcast journalism, the debate continues between proponents of individual reporting and those advocating for collaborative efforts. While technology enables individuals to wield significant influence, questions persist about the capacity of solo journalists to deliver content that meets professional standards and audience expectations. As the media landscape evolves, efficiency and quality balancing remain paramount for news organisations navigating the digital frontier.

## METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research enables researchers to reveal and understand the underlying issues of lesser-known scenarios. The interview approach was used to study solo broadcast journalism in the Industrial Revolution 4.0, focusing on the development of technology and social media.

This study involved eight informants (journalists) at a news organisation. The study locations were in Kedah, Penang, and Perlis. Purposive sampling was used to select the informants who work as solo broadcast journalists. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted to explore views on the practice of solo broadcast journalism. According to Best and Khan (2003), interviews are an important method of collecting information orally from informants, apart from obtaining clear and continuous data.

Unstructured interview patterns are applied in this research where the research questions did not follow the main guidelines of the interview (Best & Khan, 2003; Creswell, 2007). This study provides a set of brief guidelines included as a study appendix for further reference. The face-to-face interview method was conducted between the researcher and the informant after obtaining mutual agreement on the place and date. The interview method allows the researcher to gain more significant data.

The informant must complete the consent form to indicate voluntary participation in the study. The data collected is only for research purposes, and the participants' information will be kept confidential. Table 1 shows the informant profile information.

Table 1: Informant profile information

| Informant | Gender | Age | Working Experience |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Female | 30 | 7 years |
| 2 | Female | 45 | 12 years |
| 3 | Female | 28 | 4 years |
| 4 | Female | 34 | 10 years |
| 5 | Male | 30 | 10 years |
| 6 | Male | 34 | 10 years |
| 7 | Female | 37 | 10 years |
| 8 | Female | 29 | 5 years |

*Data Analysis*
Thematic analysis was employed in the data analysis. This analysis is done through line-by-line coding of the findings, and data was collected through simple ideas of information obtained (Creswell, 2007). The simple idea of information means a transcript of an interview. Ryan and Bernard (2000) stressed that thematic analysis is the core foundation of qualitative research and should be mastered by the researchers to organise data appropriately. It was also stated that thematic coding acts as a major analytic process within the analytic traditions.

Thematic analysis is best used in the present study due to its flexibility in interpretation. The type of thematic analysis used is inductive, where the bottom-up approach is applied. This approach will help the researcher group the data into themes and sub-themes according to the research data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). This study uses an inductive approach in which the data analysed have identified the themes of the transcript from the informant's answers. To elaborate, according to Braun and Clarke (2019), the inductive approach allows the data to explore the underlying themes in the study.

The phases involved in the analysis include processing initial data from the interview and content analysis, generating initial codes, selecting themes and reviewing them, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report. This ensures that the report will be more systematic, reader-friendly, and easily understandable structure (Creswell, 2007). Two independent coders specialising in broadcast journalism were also utilised to assess the themes from the in-depth interview.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings on Practices as a Solo Broadcast Journalist from an Industry Practitioner's Perspective. The findings of this study are divided into four themes: production task and location review, good time management, relationships with the community, preparation task and comfortable place, and experience of practising solo broadcast journalism at the tertiary level.

*Theme 1: Production Tasks and Location Review*
Informant 2 explained that the main focus of her job was taking photos, and producing and editing videos. Among the software used were Adobe and Kinemaster. The informant also clarified that she had not yet mastered the software because of her lack of experience and fairly young age. However, she still managed to produce and edit videos at a basic level.

> When I started joining *Sinar*, I started to do it all, including taking photos. (Informant 2)

> Then I have to publish online... and now we have to take video as well... and what not. (Informant 2)

> The other day they taught me to use Adobe, and later they asked me to install what's that. (Informant 2)

Kinemaster, and what not... But I don't know much about it. I don't know how to do it. I just can't....Hahaha...I can't. My brain cannot digest." At this age, I have to take more time to study this new technology. (Informant 2)

So far, I am just doing basic things like simple video and simple editing. (Informant 2)

Here, I have been more focused on writing; that is my major focus. (Informant 2)

Informant 4 described her daily routine at her workplace. She begins by receiving a heads-up and then heads to the location before starting with the news write-up. She will also be capturing pictures and suitable footage for the videos, and she will complete the process with video editing, which is more time-consuming. The informant also claimed that video editing is tedious as she has to explore the techniques by herself.

When we get the information, we need to go to the scene. (Informant 4)

Okey..in a day sometimes up to 3 stories that I have to do.... (Informant 4)

We need to go to the scene... take photos, make videos, everything at the time. (Informant 4)

We can finish the story at the scene; just that, for videos, we may need extra time because we need to do the editing, and this takes time. (Informant 4)

Yes, I do it myself (editing). all need to explore on my own……. (Informant 4)

To elaborate on the findings, solo journalists are found to be the second-most hired profession, apart from reporters and producers (TV News Check, 2015). Most media organisations are aware of the changes in technology and have opted to employ a solo journalist or have trained their existing journalists to operate by themselves. Solo journalists indicate that journalists were expected to gain information, write reports, record, and edit the related video and audio files before publishing them on online portals and social platforms (TV News Check, 2015).

Meanwhile, informant 6 informed me that, as a solo journalist, he had to be well-equipped with knowledge of gadgets and related equipment. For example, he had to ensure that the devices were in good condition, had sufficient memory storage, and were fully charged. These pieces of equipment will have to be advanced prepared before being used at the locations. On top of that, he also needed to grasp certain skills in photography, such as choosing the right camera angles and framing, as well as the proper way of reporting news.

> First, we need to know all about gadgets and what is related to them. Before starting our assignment, we need to ensure our phone is in good condition, for example, with enough memory and full batteries. (Informant 6)

I also need to have certain skills in terms of taking photos. I need to know which angle to take when I take the videos, and at the same time, I need to think about the content that I want to frame and the introduction as well. (Informant 6)

Informants 7 and 8 elaborated that writing skills, photography, and the mastery to produce news via digital platforms are essential in solo journalism.

> So at that time, we were just reporting news and taking pictures as well. (Informant 7)

> And we also have WhatsApp, and the video is the digital online; we have to do everything on our own. (Informant 8)

> As previously discussed, a solo journalist must have various skills, especially those related to technology and multitasking. With the amount of workload given, the quality of news produced has always been a worry for solo journalists. To avoid making mistakes while producing news stories, the journalist must be knowledgeable in various fields apart from being multi-skilled, e.g., editing videos and creating a live stream channel for news reporting (Lin & Zhou, 2018).

Another practice of solo broadcast journalism is location review. This practice is essential to the line of work. Location review refers to journalists being at the place of the incident for news production. It also refers to someone who collects information about an incident and supplies the news to online media or newspapers (Chew Cheng Sung, personal communication, 18 September 2012). Informant 5 mentioned that, as a solo broadcast journalist, he had to go to the location to complete the assignment himself. He also had to research the issue and collect the needed information before reporting the news. Other than that, he also had to take photos and videos at the scene.

> ...he has to go to the location to complete the assignment. (Informant 5)

> ...he also needs to do some research related to the issues and find the information needed before reporting the news. (Informant 5)

> If I need to take photos or videos, then I have to take them at the scene, and of course, whenever I get a task, I will go by myself because I was given responsibility from the boss to do it alone. (Informant 5)

*Theme 2: Good Time Management*
Informant 1 explained that as a solo broadcast journalist, they have to manage their time well to get complete information for the news coverage. This is to avoid any mistakes that might occur if they miss the important points of the news. She also shared her experience of arriving between

30 minutes and 1 hour earlier at the news location to take pictures and get coverage. She also mentioned that the other media sources have photographers to take photos.

> As a solo journalist, as you know, we have to manage our time well. (Informant 1)

> First, we stay to do the news coverage and, at the same time, have to be on standby mode... to take pictures, and at the same time, standby to take videos. (Informant 1)

> A solo journalist has to prepare early. (Informant 1)

> If we come at the same time with other reporters from other media or come late, we're going to miss the shot. (Informant 1)

Solo broadcast journalists are expected to meet their deadlines for completing news assignments. This includes the time for them to collect and produce news. As supported by Massineo (2015), part of a journalist's job is to complete the collection and production of news within the stipulated time. Such pressures are also faced by others in the field, for example, among video journalists. Additionally, according to Potter (2010), solo journalists need to acquire time management skills and be alert to the deadlines for each of the tasks in the process, i.e., location survey, trip to the scene, interview, writing, recording, editing, and finding free WiFi to update news quickly.

*Theme 3: Relationship with the Community, Preparation Task, and Comfortable Place*
Informant 3 explained that some of the routines she practised were maintaining a good relationship with the local community, making early preparations before going to the location, and searching for alternative places to finish the job. The informant also expressed some of the constraints she has to face in searching for a comfortable spot to write, as she was working in a small town.

> Like what I had mentioned earlier, we build good relationships with other people. (Informant 3)

> We have to prepare early because we don't have any workstations, unlike those working in the office area... They have their PC, a comfortable workstation, but as a solo journalist, we need to find a comfortable working place. (Informant 3)

> I will recce the location and try to detect some alternative places to sit for the assignment. (Informant 3)

Blankenship (2016) states that solo journalists need to do job preparation. This includes planning a task or news before going to the place news incident. Bock (2012) argues that solo

journalists should have an element of 'carrying themselves', and be present in the physical space or location news incident. The comfort of the place is also needed in producing news.

In addition, a solo journalist is an individual who has his or her routine. The solo journalist's routine includes his work with news organisations and the community. Cohendet and Lleren (2003) state that routine means a hierarchically and horizontally arranged routine (between managers and subordinates) and a horizontally arranged epistemic community routine (employees with tasks or functions with the community). This routine builds relationships between solo journalists with the management of news organisations and other communities.

*Theme 4: Experience Practising Solo Broadcast Journalism at the Tertiary Level*
Informant 8 informed she has been practising solo broadcasting since her student's days and is currently applying as a journalist. Besides the news, concerns about the news sources and the ethical guidelines to produce news must be understood by solo broadcast journalism.

> Actually this thing….. doesn't…. we don't have any problem because my background is actually in broadcasting. (Informant 8)

> ...when we go into the industry we apply whatever we have learnt during the study… (Informant 8)

> ...we need to know what type of concept to be used… and what kind of resources that we need… what are the ethical ways to produce news… (Informant 8)

Tanner et al. (2013) stated that the reality of the journalism profession is that not all employers are looking for similar skills in potential workers. The skills of journalist trainers are needed according to the organization's needs. All university journalism programs have formed the core of technical-based courses and meet the needs of the news industry. The journalism industry requires strong general knowledge, the right skills, an interest in the field, able to adapt and learn and specialised knowledge (Yusof, Ismail, Ismail, Aripin, Kassim & Ishak, 2018). Furthermore, rapid technological changes have given rise to new challenges to professional journalism (Martin, 2008; Kraeplin & Criado, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Media companies are engaged in a significant phase of technical, professional, and business transformation, powered by digital convergence and the effects of social media. Media companies are increasingly conscious that they need to improve their digital media communication strategies and react appropriately to the needs and interests of their audiences. Media workers must contend with and strive to succeed in integrated media environments, which require a high degree of collective effort and multitasking. These prerequisites occur in greater demand in online journalism, where the industry is exposed to continuous technological change and is structured towards content development in various media. Implementing solo journalism practices in news organisations is also alluring for several purposes: Flexible mobile productions ensure a reduced operational production cost and provide an immediate way of

creating video, audio, and multi-platform digital media (Salzmann, Guribye, & Gynnild, 2020). This practice has made journalists fully operational in news production and working with social media using new formats. In addition, the news presented should also suit the preferences of the younger audience.

As cited in Blankenship (2016), the report released by Bob Papper of Hofstra University discovered that the recruitment of a solo journalist remained consistent. However, the income factor and the number of news agencies have changed over the past few years. According to TV News Check (2015), solo journalists have been the second-most hired, as well as reporters and producers. Most media organisations are aware of the changes in technology and have opted to employ a solo journalist or have trained their existing journalists to operate individually. Solo journalism indicates that journalists must gain information, write reports, record, and edit sufficient video and audio relevant to the subject before it is published on online portals and social platforms. As a result, the old journalism practices have entirely changed. Before this, the journalist will work in a team with a camera operator or videographer, and sometimes with an editor. At that time, the videographer will help them record the video and audio, and help the journalist arrange the flow of the news story. In other words, media convergence trends have continued to change journalism practices for radio, broadcast, and print media.

The findings of this study show informants practice production tasks in solo broadcast journalism such as taking pictures, producing and editing videos, news writing, and research. Task preparation, location review, comfortable places, and time management are also included in the findings of this study. In addition, building community relationships is also one of the highlighted concepts in the results of the present study. Another interesting finding is that the experience of practising solo broadcast journalism at the tertiary level helps young journalists in the work field later on.

Media accountability among journalists in the context of this study refers to individuals who are on duty and skilled with news production work and other journalism practices such as time management, preparation tasks, relationships with the community, comfortable places, and location review. In other words, solo broadcast journalists must be tech-savvy and understand their responsibilities as broadcast journalists working for the news industry. This theory of media accountability contributes to the profession of solo broadcast journalism.

This study contributes to the policy and management of news organisations where news publishing jobs have changed their job practices. Journalists today work solo, which requires various new skills and training to improve the efficiency of managing news jobs. The national ICT policy and the National Broadband Policy introduced the need for a technologically skilled workforce in line with the needs of the 4.0 revolution industry. Therefore, current and future journalists need to be equipped with the skills of working solo with the help of technology. The findings of this study will impact society with appropriate adaptations to develop human capital that integrates news information and technology for solo broadcast journalism.

In addition, this study is also significant to the National Education Policy, especially in the area of broadcasting journalism on social media. Such development may be shown with the appropriate adjustments made to the content structure of the educational curriculum to be in line with the development of the digital media landscape for solo broadcast journalism. As the

media industry evolves, mastering technology remains imperative for aspiring broadcasters and journalists to remain competitive and adaptable in an ever-changing landscape.

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