

Assessing the Impact of Autonomous Media Organizations on Contemporary Society

Yimeng Ba *

King's College London, London, UK

* Corresponding Author Email: k23047941@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract. Nowadays, with the development of the internet and technology, alternative news media emerged in the media domain. While mainstream media is always being criticized, alternative news media showcases its importance because alternative news media can provide different perspectives and platforms for information. It analyzes the features, audience and differences with mainstream news media to reach the aim. The key aim of this essay is to study alternative news media and its contribution to diversifying news content. Incorporating the literature review method, it explores the alternative news media's function from many aspects. Specifically, includes positive and negative influence, influence on political beliefs and affiliations, the echo chamber effect and polarization caused by alternative news media. From these analyses, it can be concluded that alternative news media have a positive influence in providing diversity news content, it also enhances public conversation and fact-finding. Therefore, although with some negative influence, it is evident that alternative news media can promote news diversity, satisfy the needs of different audiences and bridge the gap caused by mainstream media.

Keywords: Alternative News; Traditional Media.

1. Introduction

Due to the upsurging of digital technology, the alternative new media, which provides a similar function to mainstream media, has experienced a significant increase. Currently, this kind of emerging social media has become a competitive competitor of traditional mainstream media due to the increasing number of young news consumers preferred to the new news media forms. This essay will advocate this assertion in three parts. Firstly, clearly delineate what is alternative news, then explore its beneficial aspects by focusing on news plurality, and finally explore the negative influences, such as broadcasting false information, fostering mistrust and exacerbating political polarization.

2. The Definition of Alternative News

To start the research, the first thing that needs to be clarified is the definition of alternative news. In recent years, the media context experienced low choices, such as newspapers, and television, to high choices, such as personal laptops, smartphones, the Internet and social media. This boost benefited from the inventions and spread of digital and technological equipment mentioned above. In this circumstance, the alternative news media increased sharply. Low-cost news dissemination not only contributes to this phenomenon but also saves more capital for alternative media operations [1]. Alternative news media can be defined as digital news platforms which include themes from personal, emergent formats, and topics beyond narrow news, from the perspective of young news consumers [2]. From an academic perspective, alternative news media is defined as the correctives or opposition of the existing news media, which can provide perspectives from easily ignored sides and attempt to arouse social and political reforms [3]. Prominent examples of online news programs include The Intercept Brasil and MadaMasr from Brazil and Egypt respectively, which aim to criticize the mainstream news media and the political patterns within their country [4].

3. Positive Impact of Alternative News

There is also a necessitate to concentrate on the beneficial influence of alternative news. Alternative new media mainly contribute to the news diversity. Organizationally, alternative news outlets value justice and power of ordinary people from a collective, participative and non-rated news productive structure. Content-wise, alternative new media fostered a diversified media context, which enriches the content of news media by incorporating neglected topics and themes in mainstream news media [5]. Nowadays, audiences read information from mainstream websites with doubts, as the news on these platforms is driven by commercial and political pressures from the audience's perspective [2]. Therefore, alternative news media can supply news resources to fulfill the needs of audiences who have low trust in mainstream media. In return, the alternative news media will consolidate the distrust of mainstream news media among modern new readers by criticizing insufficient news coverage [3]. However, young news audiences are inclined to utilize both news sources to acknowledge news rather than replacing traditional established news media with alternative news media [2].

3.1. Impact on Public Opinion

One of the positive impacts is alternative news fosters critical thinking in its viewers by giving them many perspectives. Modern news readers are encouraged to critically examine the narratives put out by mainstream media, so fostering a more intricate comprehension of many matters [6]. Engaging critically with news may result in a more knowledgeable and contemplative public opinion. Alternative news has a big effect on how people feel about many different things, according to Holt, Ustad Figenschou, and Frischlich [7]. Because of changes in technology and the rise of social media, the effect of alternative news on public opinion has become more noticeable [8]. Through their coverage of news, analysis, and comments, alternative news sources can affect public opinion in some ways. According to Rauch, alternative news can present topics in a certain way, highlighting some aspects and downplaying others [6]. They can also change how people think about events and people by choosing which stories to cover and how they are presented. Aside from that, the rise of independent news sources has made media knowledge even more important. People get better at spotting biases, checking the accuracy of information, and understanding the details of news stories as they read more popular and independent sources [9]. Better media literacy makes people smarter so they can form their own opinions by carefully analysing the news. In addition, Buyens and Van Aelst say that many independent news sources focus on neighbourhood or community-focused problems that aren't always covered by major media [10]. By bringing these issues to light, they encourage people to get involved in and support their communities. Focusing on a certain area could lead to public opinion that is more in line with what the community wants and needs.

3.2. Response by Traditional Media

One important thing about alternative news is that it can give different points of view from mainstream media. Klawier, Prochazka, and Schweiger say that alternative news websites often have strong political views, such as being against the government and the powerful [11]. These platforms offer coverage that differs from what the mass media covers. They do this by giving a voice to points of view that are usually ignored or pushed to the edges. One thing that stands out is how popular right-wing independent news media has become. The growth of alternative news outlets shows that journalism is losing its credibility, which challenges the idea that journalists are the only trustworthy sources of information [12]. Because that's how they work, alternative media criticises mainstream media for not being trustworthy, pointing out bias, distance from the public, leaving out important views, and acting as a safe space for powerful people [5].

3.3. Changes in Traditional Media Strategies

One of the beneficial influences of alternative media on modern news consumers is its support for the transformation of established media approaches. According to Zanettin, an essential element of alternative media and their quest for legitimacy entails scrutinising established media, which includes the structural conditions of the established press, the journalists employed and their methodologies, and the content distributed by mainstream media [13]. Some assert that alternative news sources with left-leaning perspectives often engage in critical analysis of the financial interests of the press, whilst right-wing endeavours tend to concentrate their attention on purported ideological biases within the professional journalistic domain. In Cushion's study, it is seen that both right-wing and left-wing alternative media entities, together with their respective viewership, maintain the perspective that the press institution is not meeting its own established criteria [14]. Moreover, Heft, Ramsland and Mayerhöffer also see the conventional news media as insufficiently representing a wide array of viewpoints [15]. Therefore, the use of politically or socially and culturally radical content and style by alternative news organisations to redress perceived structural inequalities has considerable editorial importance. Because of this, traditional news sources have had to change how they do things to stay competitive since alternative news has come out. As a result, traditional media practices have changed, such as working together, buying things, and adding more material [6]. A lot of traditional media companies have teamed up with or bought alternate platforms in order to reach more people and offer more types of material. In addition, mainstream media outlets have started to include different points of view in their stories, realising how important it is to appeal to a wide range of readers [5].

3.4. Partnerships, Acquisitions, and Content Diversification

The criticism of traditional news media led to an empirical study of how well alternative news channels follow the idea of reflecting a range of viewpoints and the worth of such variety [5]. Thus, alternative media has a favourable influence on current news audiences by enhancing content variety. Previous academic research has mostly concentrated on the measurement of variety and the theoretical significance of media diversity within a democratic society [16]. The existing body of literature widely agrees that the media, irrespective of its expansive definition, play a crucial role in democratic societies. The major purpose of these entities is to provide people with the necessary information to make educated judgements pertaining to political and personal matters. The media must include a diverse audience by including a broad spectrum of actors, ideas, and perspectives [13]. This methodology guarantees the visibility of a pluralist society, so allowing substantive discourse and negotiation. According to Buyens and Van Aelst, political theories vary greatly in their interpretation of a well-functioning democracy, which is influenced by normative assumptions on the media's function and the public domains [10]. When analysing the importance and impact of alternative news sources, it is essential to carefully choose a theoretical framework. Although these forms of media have the potential to enrich the range of news sources and serve as a valuable complement to the prevailing mainstream, they may also cultivate skepticism, skepticism, and animosity due to their adversarial media critique and anti-democratic positions.

Besides, compared with traditional news media, youngsters seem to prefer alternative media for the following reasons. Firstly, alternative news is often released on digital media platforms, such as social media, which is consistent with the news-reading behaviors of youngsters. They would rather visit social media to acknowledge news than log in to traditional news websites or applications [2]. Secondly, alternative media news often attracts new audiences bored by mature, just, cold content in traditional news media by providing novel and intriguing content and display formats. Thirdly, alternative media oppose the fame, justice and unbiased images professed by traditional media, which is considered as twisted content that is subject to brand names and political intentions. This helps win the trust of the news audience and leads them to a high engagement rate. Then, the reliability of alternative media built by the veracity, responsibility and strict media professional standards wins more trust of the audience. This is the approach adopted by Brazilian the Intercept Brasil and Egyptian

MadaMasr to attract potential and existing readers [4]. Fourthly, alternative media form a kindred spirits platform to encourage people to contribute to society by endowment or express their comments. It has been proved that the audience prefers interactive media practice to traditional established news media. The alternative media win more trust within the process [17]. Lastly, the reason why audiences like engaging in alternative media is that the information on alternative media can enhance their ideology not against their beliefs. Furthermore, social media platforms' algorithmic promote content to the audiences' preference, which in reverse gives alternative news more chances to be seen by news audiences [2].

4. The Negative Impact of Alternative News

Last but not least, the negative influence of alternative new media cannot be ignored. The alternative media may challenge society by its news spreading. The news in such media often carries biases and fake information that can exacerbate the situation of certain events. This is a chronic problem in digital media [5]. Criticism of news coverage in mainstream media is one feature of alternative media. If this criticism is done properly without bias, it can promote healthy correction in mainstream media. However, alternative media may lead to suspects, mistrust and hatred by manipulating public sentiment and criticizing counterparty. It will even encourage political polarisation, especially the extreme right-wing alternative media, which provide contents with controversial, bipartisan and progressive [5]. The final goal of these media is to escalate the media audience and 'market' their extreme right-wing belief system. This escalating process is overly dependent on alternative media, the tactics of influencers on it and the algorithmic promotion by social media platforms [17]. The process often functions in the following steps. Alternative media utilize online influencer technology to encourage the audience to refuse opinions from mainstream media. Once the established worldview diminishes, they inculcate the extremism creed to news audiences to shape their understanding of the world. Social media platforms serve as a key factor in promoting this process, as their function mechanism, the recommended algorithm may present more extremist content for potential audiences. For example, YouTube, monetizes everyone's personal influence, even if their values are really harmful. Hence, it is easy to access extremist content and get promotion on this topic on YouTube. Thus, made it an effective alternative media, which spread extremist values and discriminate thoughts [17]. Finally, these radical alternative media offer platforms for distorting common worldviews and promoting extremist ideologies thus exacerbating polarized politics. Consequently, undermines the normal societal orders.

4.1. Influence on Political Beliefs and Affiliations

An additional negative impact of alternative media is its ability to cultivate inaccurate political beliefs, erode trust in conventional news sources and contribute to the exacerbation of partisan polarization [18]. Moreover, scholarly research has provided evidence indicating that the consumption of alternative media content elicits significant levels of user engagement on social networking platforms [19]. Moreover, the utilization of these platforms has been found to be strongly associated with exposure to alternative media [11]. The uses and gratifications hypothesis posits that individuals engage with media in order to satisfy certain needs. Audience conduct may be categorized as either ritualized or instrumental under this approach. Ritualized media usage is characterized by passivity and habituation, often motivated by a need for distraction. On the other hand, instrumental media use is active and primarily driven by the need for knowledge [11]. Moreover, the use of instrumental media is expected to yield more significant outcomes compared to the utilization of ritualized media, since the audience will exhibit a heightened inclination to engage with the material they encounter. The consumption of alternative news may be seen as instrumental, since individuals who engage with alternative news are inclined to actively pursue information that aligns more closely with their tastes and satisfies their requirements compared to the material often provided in mainstream media [12]. In essence, those who consume alternative news sources are inclined to

exhibit a high level of motivation and engagement. In practical terms, individuals have the ability to get information from alternative news media via the official websites of these channels [20]. However, it is common for their material to also be accessible through social networking platforms. Furthermore, there exists a strong correlation between alternative news sources and social movements [16]. Consequently, alternative news sources often flourish during periods of social and political upheaval. Alternative media may be broadly described as a kind of media that is dedicated to presenting alternative perspectives on problems and events that differ from those presented in mainstream media. Its primary objective is to promote social and political change.

4.2. The Echo Chamber Effect and Polarization (negative)

The echo chamber effect and polarization are also one negative impact of alternative media. Kim argues that alternative news media's negative impact not merely influences websites, but also multiple actors, because of the biases in alternative media's communication ecosystems and political factions [21]. The actors inside alternative news media reiteratively spread similar fake news among various topics and incidents. Together with propaganda on political intrigues, they also preached theories that deny climate science, vaccinations, and round earth. Additionally, they also make their endeavor on social media, like Twitter, to promote thus false theories and reach more potential participants.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, alternative news media influence the contemporary news audiences both positively and negatively in many aspects. These media provide a highly participatory, engaging and democratic mechanism, which includes wider topics and arguments compared with traditional media. Thus, increasing the diversity of media. However, they may also exacerbate the spread of misleading information and extreme political tendencies. Moreover, their criticism of the opinions of traditional news media can result in hostility, skepticism and distrust among news consumers. It is worth noticing that the process of extreme right-wings utilizing social media to sabotage society is harmful. It will deepen the political polarization and interrupt normal societal order. Therefore, with the evolving media market, the information producer and news consumers both need to employ a critical attitude towards information and treasure the opportunity to utilize information freely. The potential risks are in the way we use the media. The public discourse right needs complex capability to deal with misleading information, which will break the harmonious status quo. Hence, maybe clear laws and policies to examine information and lessons to cultivate critical thinking ability about information can help prevent harm from alternative media.

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