

Shaping the Media Landscape: Exploring Media User Consumption in the Age of Social Media

Ziman Li

University of Westminster London, UK

Abstract: The innovation in social media and digital technology has profoundly transformed media user consumption patterns and habits, significantly impacting the Media, Entertainment, and Information (MEI) industry. Among the various sectors affected, the news industry stands out as one of the most profoundly influenced. This article employs the news industry as a case study and delves into changes in audience behavior and media organizational relationships, alterations in news content, and dissemination methods to further dissect the shifts in the ways users access news. Consequently, it derives insights into how media user behavior changes impact the news industry.

Keywords: Audience Behavior; News Industry; Social Media; Media Organization.

1. Introduction

At present, society is in an era of the rapid development of science and technology. Technological innovation, especially network, and digital technology, promotes the continuous improvement of social media platforms, thus changing the behavior and consumption habits of media users and also exerting a series of impacts on different media organizations. In particular, the digitalization of the media, entertainment, and information (MEI) industry have provided new opportunities for sharing and creating media content. Today's media content, such as news, music, books, and videos, can be distributed online and disseminated through social networks and digital platforms (Ngai, Tao, and Moon, 2015). As a result, the way media users access media content, and their propensity to consume has also changed dramatically. Therefore, compared with the past, the method of media users' access to media content and consumption tendency has also changed significantly, which has a positive or negative impact on various media industries and organizations. Media industries should fully understand the changes in user behavior and consumption trend in the current social media era and develop on this basis.

Among the industries involved in MEI (media, entertainment, and information), the news industry is one of the industries with the longest development and the biggest influence of media user behavior. The arrival of the internet has changed the way of information dissemination and made access to news more diversified. With the influence of social media platforms and digital news, the way of the audience getting news has gradually changed from the original newspaper and radio-television to online and streaming news. The content and dissemination of news are more determined by many social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This article takes the news industry as an example to analyze the impact of changes in media user behavior on the news industry.

2. Literature Review

With the development of a social media platform, the interaction between media users and digital media becomes more and easier. With the continuous improvement of

network and mobile devices, people spend more time on social media and use it as the main way to obtain content, platform, and service. The media industry is based on meeting the needs of the audience (Lamberton and Stephen, 2015). This series of changes in user behavior has a direct impact on different media organizations. Because social media has completely changed the way of life of many people in just a decade, more and more scholars are studying the behavior of media users in the era of social media from different perspectives. This part selects the following three aspects of literature to study according to the theme of the article.

2.1. The Change in the Relationship between Audience Behavior and Media Organization

The first section explains the change of the relationship between audience behavior and media organization in the digital media age. With the advent of the digital age, the competition among media has increasingly manifested itself in the ability to develop and meet the deep needs of audiences. Doyle (2013) emphasizes the importance of individual media user demand in the digital media age.

“The main changes brought on by recent technological advances have been a steady rise in avenues available for distribution of media and the rapid spread of delivery platforms and devices that enable more connectivity and different forms of user engagement with content.” (P77)

Due to the current digital trend of media, media users can obtain the media content they want through a variety of methods, and they are more inclined to their interests in the choice of content. Which changes the one-way communication relationship of traditional media, and greatly improves the initiative, selectivity, participation, and interaction of people in information communication. With the improvement of the social media platform, the audience gradually began to occupy a dominant position, which can edit and secondary communication based on media content selection.

The audience's media needs are manifested in two aspects: first is the content products and services provided by the media; second is the way of providing and the experience for the audience (Heinonen, 2011). Media organizations not only need to meet the needs of the audience in the content of the

communication but also need to make some improvements in the form of content communication to meet the consumption habits of the audience.

2.2. Changes in the Way Users Get News

The second section examines the change of users' access to news in the age of social media. With the deepening of digitalization and networking, the influence of traditional media on people is more and weaker. In many media industries, traditional media has gradually lost its advantages, and the rise of social media has accelerated this change. Users' choice of news consumption mode is mainly based on the following two points. First of all, the most important feature of news is its timeliness. People can get news in time through the communication of social media platforms, which cannot be met by traditional news communication methods such as newspapers and television (Ray, 2015). Besides, users pay more attention to the convenience of getting the news. With the continuous development of mobile devices, users only need a mobile phone to get news anytime and anywhere. Compared with newspaper news and TV news, online news has fewer limitations

It can be seen that in the era of social media, most of the users turn to online news and streaming news, among which the most obvious group is young media users. According to Antunovic (2016), because of the popularity of the use of mobile devices, this generation of young people has similar news consumption habits. They are used to viewing news on computers or mobile phones. The younger generation of users will spend more time on social media platforms, especially through mobile phones, to access social media has become a trend among young people. Due to the advantages of the fast and wide range of network communication, the user group's consumption of news has no longer been affected by the time and place, and its choice of the way to obtain news is more extensive.

2.3. The Changes in Newspaper Consumption in the Era of Social Media

In the third section, there is a discussion of the changes in newspaper consumption in the era of social media. A newspaper is the most ancient carrier of news communication. With the development of network technology, a newspaper not only refers to the print publication, which mainly publishes news and current affairs comments but also includes electronic newspaper and newspaper app of the mobile client. With the improvement of broadband Internet usage and the continuous updating of new devices for transmitting digital content, the global newspaper publishing industry is going through a period of disruption, and more and more consumers are turning from traditional printing media to digital media (Paulussen and Harder, 2014).

While the potential for online media is huge in the long run, print newspapers remain the primary source of newspaper publishing. The way of obtaining information through newspapers has had a deep-rooted impact on people, which cannot be easily changed. But newspapers are now in a transition from print to online. Because of the development of digital media, most people's consumption mode of the newspaper is also changing from browsing print to browsing the online newspaper. Thurman states that the circulation of the printed newspaper has declined sharply, and the development of the whole newspaper industry is not optimistic. Unless newspaper publishers can make good use

of the advantages of paper news to attract readers, the decline of newspapers will continue (2018). So, in the age of social media, the newspaper industry faces a serious challenge.

From the above three aspects of literature research, we can find that in the current age of social media, the user's behavior has an increasing impact on the media organization. The media organization needs to formulate development strategies in line with the current situation according to the needs of the audience and consumption trends. Because of the continuous digital development of the media, the news consumption mode of media users has changed from the traditional newspaper and TV mode to online news browsing through the internet. This also has an impact on the traditional news communication carrier—newspaper. The declining sales of print newspapers have posed a huge challenge to the whole newspaper industry.

3. Case-Study Analysis

Among many media industries, the news industry is closely related to the life of the audience, so the change in audience behavior will have a direct and significant impact on it. This part analyzes a series of impacts on the news industry caused by the changes of media users' behavior in the era of social media through some relevant survey data and news market reports.

3.1. Changes in the Way Users Access News

With the development of Internet technology, many changes have taken place in the way of the audience getting the news. The social media platform has become the most direct way for users to browse and get news. The traditional way of newspaper and broadcasting has been gradually replaced by a simple and convenient way of browsing the web. The continuous development of a social platform to promote the production of all kinds of social software applications, especially social applications with the main purpose of disseminating information, such as Facebook, Twitter and so on, which regularly push hot topics and current events news every day (Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). Therefore, users would prefer to use such social apps to browse the news, naturally ignoring other ways, just like newspapers, TV, and even websites.

According to the statistics of the Pew Research Center, about two-thirds of people in the United States will get news through social media. Researchers have investigated some mainstream social application users. Now in 2018, 67 percent of Facebook users, 71 percent of Twitter users, and 73 percent of Reddit users use these social platforms to get news (Shearer and Matsa, 2018). Take Facebook as an example to make a simple calculation. In 2018, the number of users of Facebook in the United States had reached 190 million. That is to say, the daily news pushed by Facebook will affect about 127 million Americans, and the total population of the United States is only 319 million, so about one in three Americans will receive Facebook news on this day (Facebook, 2018).

It can be seen that the development of social media will completely change the way that audiences get news. With the continuous popularity of network and mobile devices, users' consumption of news will be more digital and mobile.

3.2. The Influence of Changes in User Behavior on the News Industry

As the consumer behavior of the audience tends to be

digitization and mobility, the traditional way of news communication will face severe challenges. Therefore, TV, newspapers, and other media must change their views, especially in terms of content dissemination adjustment (Newman, 2011). For example, many newspapers have developed their electronic version and mobile client so that users can access content through more convenient channels. This trend also promotes the development of online news. The information of online news can be provided free of charge or paid subscription.

Fletcher (2019) points out in a report on digital news that while the news industry has made some efforts to adapt to current trends, there has been little change in subscribers to online news, especially in countries like Japan, where most news is free. Due to the increase of news channels, most users will choose to get news through free channels, so some professional news clients are far less profitable than Facebook and Twitter, which are free social platforms for information dissemination. This is also an important reason why many official online news clients and web pages cannot develop.

In addition, the news content that users receive through social media platforms is not strictly censored, so its accuracy is not high, and sometimes fake news is even generated. This has led to the threat of social media to the journalistic industry, which used to be known for its objectivity, accuracy, and authenticity. Most social media news consumers have concerns about the accuracy of the news. According to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Report, 60 percent of respondents in a new survey no longer believe in news content on social media platforms (Moneywatch, 2018). On the other hand, media users lose confidence in the news spread through social platforms, which provides space for the development of traditional news carriers such as newspapers and TV. It can start from the most fundamental accuracy of news and combine the current network and mobile device technology to create a more professional online news (Harper, 2010).

To sum up, the behavior of media users has a direct and profound impact on the news industry as a whole, which not only makes the news dissemination mode become dominated by social media platforms but also plays a supervision role in regulating news content from the side.

4. Conclusion

Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the main points. The key question addressed in this essay was to take the news industry as an example to analyze the impact of media user behavior on media organizations. Based on the discussions outlined in this paper, it can be suggested that the relationship between audiences and media organizations has changed in the digital age. Media users are in an active position, and the change of their media consumption habits will have a direct and obvious impact on the media industry. The development of science and technology has brought us into the age of social media. Users in this age are more seeking convenience and efficiency in the consumption of media content, which has a great impact on the news industry characterized by timeliness and communication. In the news industry, due to the continuous improvement of mobile devices and networks, media users tend to get news through social media. This series of changes in user behavior also brings great challenges to traditional news carriers, such as newspapers, which need to develop new models more to suit the needs of the current media market. This essay concludes that the behavior of media users has changed dramatically,

and the impact of these changes on the media industry cannot be ignored. Media organizations, especially the news industry, which is directly affected by user behavior, should pay more attention to changes in media user behavior and better adapt to the era of social media.

References

- [1] Antunovic, D., Parsons, P., Cooke, T.R. (2018). 'Checking' and googling: Stages of news consumption among young adults. *Journalism*. 19 (5), 632-648. Available from <https://doi.org.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/10.1177/1464884916663625> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [2] Doyle, G. (2013). *Understanding Media Economics*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. Available from <https://search.ebscohost-com.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/login.aspx?Direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1099467&site=ehost-live&scope=site> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [3] Esteban Ortiz-Ospina (2019). The rise of social media. *Our World in Data*. Available from <https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [4] Facebook (2018). 2018 Annual Report and Form. Available from http://www.annualreports.com/HostedData/AnnualReports/PDF/NASDAQ_FB_2018.pdf [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [5] Fletcher, R. (2019). *Digital News Report*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. Available from <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/paying-for-news-and-the-limits-of-subscription/> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [6] Harper, R. A. (2010). The Social Media Revolution: Exploring the Impact on Journalism and News Media Organizations. *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse* [Online], 2. Available from <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=202> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [7] Heinonen, K. (2011). Consumer activity in social media: Managerial approaches to consumers' social media behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*. 10 (6), 356-364. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.376> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [8] Lamberton, P. C., Stephen, T.A. (2015). Taking Stock of the Digital Revolution: A Critical Analysis and Agenda for Digital, Social Media, and Mobile Marketing Research. *Saïd Business School WP 2015-16*. Available from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2675139 [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [9] Moneywatch (2018). People don't trust social media -- that's a growing problem for businesses. *CBS NEWS*. Available from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/edelman-survey-shows-low-trust-in-social-media/> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [10] Newman, N. (2011). Mainstream media and the distribution of news in the age of social media (RISJ Reports). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford. Available from <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:94164da6-9150-4938-8996-badfd6b507> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [11] Ngai, E.W.T., Tao, S.S.C., and Moon, K.K.L. (2015). Social media research: Theories, constructs, and conceptual frameworks. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2014.09.004> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [12] Paulussen, S. and Harder, R.A. (2014). Social Media References in Newspapers. *Journalism Practice*. 8 (5), 542-551. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.894327> [Accessed 5 January 2020].

- [13] Ray, S. (2015). Empirical Analysis of User Behavior in Social Media. Available from [https://www. researchgate. net/ publication/292972444_Empirical_Analysis_of_User_Behavi or_in_Social_Media/citation/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292972444_Empirical_Analysis_of_User_Behavior_in_Social_Media/citation/download) [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [14] Shearer, E., and Mutsaers, E.K. (2018). News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2018. Pew Research Center. Available from <https://www.journalism.org/2018/09/10/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2018/> [Accessed 5 January 2020].
- [15] Thurman, N. (2018). Newspaper Consumption in the Mobile Age. *Journalism Studies*. 19 (10), 1409-1429. Available from [https:// doi-org.ezproxy. westminster. ac.uk/10. 1080/ 1461 670X. 2017.1279028](https://doi-org.ezproxy.westminster.ac.uk/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1279028) [Accessed 5 January 2020].