

The Rise of New Media: A Benefit or a Threat to Traditional Media-Based Society?

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Abstract: It is widely acknowledged that the development of new media has imposed a significant influence on the traditional-media-based society, but how? This paper focuses on the multi-dimensional impact of the rise of new media on the modern society which is based on traditional media. This work is investigated from four different directions: reduced public's trust in the media, acceleration of the spread of fake news, increase in political polarization and anti-government attributes of media responses, and the replacement of traditional media in commercial promotion. The research supports each viewpoint with specific social examples and comes to the conclusion that people's opinions are more easily controlled by the media. Finally, this paper calls for more research on how people could maintain their independence of thought in the face of new media and use new media to benefit mankind.

Keywords: new media, fake news, public's trust, anti-government attributes.

1. Introduction

According to the Reuters Institute, interest in news has fallen sharply across markets, from 63% in 2017 to 51% in 2022[1]. The development of digital communication technology has brought about the era of digital media. The rapid growth of new media platforms has changed the way people get news. In the past, people relied on traditional news (television, radio, newspapers, etc.) to get new information. But now, a lot of new media platforms provided by the internet have emerged, such as TikTok, Instagram, and Weibo. People tend to get information faster through new media. Traditional journalism is playing less of a role in the media-influenced society and suffering a huge impact brought by new media. Studying the impact of new media on traditional journalism is essential. Firstly, it can better help traditional journalism cope with the impact brought by new media platforms, and secondly, it can find out the problems of new media platforms in spreading news. The aim of this paper is to study the impact of new media on traditional journalism. The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Firstly, it is worth considering the bad effects of fake news brought about by the development of new media. Secondly, The impact on public trust is also one of the main points of

our study. Thirdly, new media is becoming political, which has implications for politics as a whole. Finally, advertising in new media is also very different from traditional news.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Truth Behind Mass Spread Fake News

The development of new media information platforms has allowed the rapid spread of fake news. Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed the rapid progression of social media platforms starting with My Space hitting one million active monthly users in the early 2000s to contemporary behemoths like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. It is clear that while these platforms make access to various types of information easy and convenient, they have also hindered the public's ability to validate and scrutinize the information they are presented with. The rapid development of social media platforms has resulted in an influx and overload of information for many netizens. As Nobel Prize-winning economist and psychologist Herbert A. Simon noted, "What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients.". One of the first consequences of the so-called attention economy is the loss of high-quality information. People are so overloaded with the information they receive every day that it's impossible to determine the validity of all the information which leaves a large gap for fake news to sprout and grow.

A 2021 study conducted by Lazar, L., Pop, M.I., highlights the detrimental impact of the spread of misinformation through four major events: the 2016 presidential election in the USA, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2020 American presidential election[2]. All of these outcomes have been greatly impacted by the spread of misinformation on internet platforms. The 2016 US presidential election, is a great representation of this phenomenon when false accusations and speculations from both parties have been vastly promoted on social media platforms such as Twitter. Bovet et al selected a dataset of 171 million tweets in five months preceding the election day to identify 30 million tweets, from 2.2 million users, which contain links to news outlets[3]. They found that 25% of the tweets spread extremely biased and fake news. Twitter, as well as other platforms, categorizes similar information in groups and then pairs these groups with similar user preferences creating echo chambers "where unsubstantiated claims or true information, aligned with these beliefs, are as likely to propagate virally." [4]. This triggered mass polarization of communities in news consumption. In general, people who have a strong belief in their political views are pushed to their respective extremes even more under these circumstances. As Bovet et al. report, "Out of 30.7 million tweets containing an URL directing to a news outlet 10%" of them lead to a website that contains fake news or conspiracy theories and 15 points towards websites with extremely biased news." [4]. This impact is exemplified by the usage of bots to target social media influencers through replies and mentions ensuring that fact-checking articles disappear in the core of the networks while millions of bots fill the comments replying to other users. The network of filtering data checks information and the over-simplification of information has essentially made the internet-using-public a testing ground for large social media and printing press corporations to gain profit. This is especially harmful as politicians can abuse this filtering method to obtain a better stance for their party, creating mass corruption in the governmental system. People often realize the impact of the results too late when the politician is introducing policies contrary to what they advertised online.

2.2. Development of New Media has Reduced the Public's Trust in Journalism

The development of new media has reduced the public's trust in journalism. The lower threshold of news dissemination and the stronger subjectivity of news communicators not only reduce the authority of traditional news among the public but also guide the public to improve their self-awareness and suspicion consciousness. So, people are becoming less and less trusting of journalism

New media have lowered the barrier to news dissemination. Traditional journalism ensures the authenticity and authority of news. Traditional journalists have received professional training, and they have specialty literacy and a code of ethics. To take an example, the People's Daily which is the largest newspaper in China requires staff to have excellent writing skills and strong news sense, love the Party's journalism, adhere to the Marxist view of journalism, abide by the professional ethics of journalists, and have lofty life and career ideals[5]. In brief, Traditional journalism has a high threshold of entry and certain social responsibilities, so the news from traditional journalism is authoritative and authentic. Besides, due to the rapid spread of information on new media, there will often be some news inconsistent with the actual situation in the report of news events, which will cause public panic, and this will lead to the loss of credibility. A video of the Taipei 101 building shaking after the September 18 earthquake went viral on TikTok, and officials eventually proved that the film was untrue[6]. To sum up, with the rapid spread of new media and the low threshold of news sources, some reports against the facts will often appear, which will cause misunderstanding in the audience

New media makes the presentation of news more subjective. A study by the Rand Corporation proves this point. "Over time, and as society moved from 'old' to 'new' media, news content has generally shifted from the more-objective event- and context-based reporting to reporting that is more subjective, relies more heavily on argumentation and advocacy, and includes more emotional appeals"[7]. New media platforms, such as TikTok and Weibo, are emerging as important sources of entertainment and information, and a large proportion of traditional newspaper subscribers are turning their attention to well-known users of new media. The decline of traditional news users and the rise of Internet we-media subscriptions which lead to the competitiveness of the entire news media industry. Therefore, the whole industry in order to have enough revenue to keep going, they're trying to drive up its attention and Internet traffic. More specifically speaking, they tend to publish news that fits the general interest so that they can connect and interact with the public, although some news content does not conform to the correct value orientation, and only arouses public opinion. In the Tangshan attacks incident, there are differences in the focus of reporting between traditional journalism and new media. In traditional journalism, the objective reporting of the event itself is usually the focus of the report. There are some proofs of this. "All suspects in the women's assault case formally arrested", "Building a civilized society must safeguard public security", "We will firmly punish perpetrators of violence in accordance with the law and condemn online violence against innocent people" [8-10]. On the contrary, an article on the public account "In Girls" that was read more than 100,000 times, it takes the dignity of women trampled on and punishes the victims as the center. There are some quotes from the comments below: "She's not wearing revealing clothes, she's not going somewhere unsafe, she's not picking fights, why are the fists still landing on her! Women don't need to learn to protect themselves, they need real respect!", "The girls are rebelling. The problem is that female power is not as strong as male power. The only thing that can protect girls is the law! Don't let the world feel hopeless". All these have influenced the course of events, it reduces people's trust in ultimately objective and truthful news reporting [11].

2.3. New Media Reduces Public Trust in Politics

Traditional media consists of mature mass media institutions that predate the Internet, such as newspapers, radio programs, and TV news programs, co-existing with new media derived from communication technology innovations in recent years. In contrast to traditional media, which has maintained a relatively traditional and stable mode of information dissemination, expression of opinions, etc., a series of new media including websites, blogs, video sharing platforms, digital applications and social media is expanding in innovative ways. Considering the aims of mass media involve the "commodification of symbolic forms and the existence of alternative media (whose

audiences are often smaller than mainstream media), new media can deliver information directly to individuals without the intervention of editors or institutional gatekeepers (which are inherent in traditional forms) [12]. As a result, new media introduces high instability and unpredictability.

In order to achieve the above aims, new media more clearly reflect the different positions of different social groups, including ordinary people and politicians, and frequently devolve into expressions of hostility and ad hominem attacks. For example, in January 2019, then-President Donald Trump tweeted that "Admiral McChrystal was fired by Obama like a dog." and accused the other party of being a supporter of Hillary Clinton. Previously, Trump sparked controversy on Twitter about NFL players protesting racial oppression during the national anthem before games. He used insulting terms to refer to the predominantly African-American players and urged team owners to fire those who supported the demonstrations. His social media has sparked widespread discussion and has greatly contributed to the polarization of people's political and racial views.

Due to media depression theory, new media is showing its own anti-government and anti-system attributes [13]. The dissemination of new media often does not take objectivity as the highest standard and "maverick" and "eye-catching" have become important goals of the new media industry. The decline in trust in expertise and authority is largely the result of the emergence of new media. As previously marginalized and even extreme voices were amplified by the new media, people began to turn away from the old media, believing it to be elitist and inauthentic.

Some social media sites facilitate more heated political debate than others such as Facebook, which includes highly personal and identifiable information about users and any comments they may post on any political topic [14]. The enabling of freedom of speech in the new media makes them a breeding ground for anti-government groups or movements. For instance, in social media apps such as WhatsApp and Signal, the information of its users is digitally encrypted, so that the government is unable to know or interfere with users' actions.

2.4. New Media Replaces Traditional Journalism with more Targeted Propaganda and Advertisement

New media have changed the means of advertising and, as a result, have greatly changed the public's consumption patterns. Firstly, new media have expanded the way people get information about products. In the contemporary world, new media like TikTok and Twitter eliminate the limits on how and when people can get information and have almost eliminated the time it takes to deliver this information. In contrast to traditional journalism, those media have greatly changed and enhanced the speed and scope of advertising and propaganda. Secondly, today's social media can satisfy people's autonomy as opposed to their passive acceptance of information about products from traditional journalism. It enables people to feel as if they are proactively choosing what they want to buy. The propaganda of traditional journalism focuses on coverage of mass viewers. While the new media tailors the advertisements to the audience based on their actions, so the advertisements can easily capture their targets. A person on social media will almost always choose information consistent with their own interests and beliefs. The information can be shared to everyone around them, forming a circle. Advertisements on social media are simpler to target and grasp a large group's emotions[15]. This is not only much easier for businesses to capture their target consumers, but also gives consumers more access to information and a better understanding of products. Thirdly, social media makes communication with people and consumers more interactive, which is conducive to more effective communication. In this case, today's social media brings development momentum and a better information service model to traditional media. By using social media, advertisers have improved the quality of their services to satisfy more audiences. Today's social media is often "conceptualized techno-centrally" meaning it has a great positive impact on advertising propaganda because it can shorten the distance between advertisers and consumers[16]. As advertisement on social media has

grown into a mature industry, people's consumption opinions are also changed unconsciously. In the context of social media, "advertising appeals have a significant positive impact on consumers' purchase intention" [17]. It improves brand recognition and audience acceptance by creating a new brand image and a new consumer concept, further influencing the audience's consumption choice and consumption habits. On the positive side, with more understanding of the products, people can make their consumption choices more carefully and rationally. However, consumers' preferences and emotions are much easier to guide by social media, which could result in unnecessary consumption and the pursuit of shoddy products. Without the strict restrictions of the government, even harmful products can be easily sold to their target group with high demand.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the prevalence of new media has not only drastically changed the authenticity, objectivity, and predictability of traditional journalism but has led audiences to a new era of advertising and consumption. People's opinions are easier to be controlled by new media as a result. At first glance, people believe they are gaining autonomy through social media, however, the opposite is true. While new media have brought human beings to a carnival of information, they also caused inevitable repercussions. As the trend of new media is ever-evolving, what could people do to utilize the information of new media without being the slave of it? In order to benefit human beings more, this giant industry needs further analysis through future studies to remedy the detrimental societal implications it has caused.

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