

Social media's impact on media mediums



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In 1967, Marshall McLuhan reformed the meaning of mediums and the result they have on information. In his book, "Medium is the Message", McLuhan stated that "the message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (9). Now in 2018, a new medium exists at the forefront of amiable culture in today's society, social media. Social media as a medium for news involves the ideology McLuhan wrote about. The rise of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms have taken over our generation and it's no craze. With the spread and growth of social media as a medium in which information is shared, this trend will continue to shape how we get our news in the future. Although Marshall McLuhan's stance on medium's portraying a message was published more than 50 years ago, his beliefs are still common in today's society. Gathering news content on social media platforms has pros to society as well as real cons. However, the benefits of using social media and mobile as the mediums for news outweigh the harms. With the immense growth of social media as a platform for information, the message in the medium has and will continue to shape the future of media and popular culture for the better due to the people they reach, the associated risks and limitations they highlight, and the effect they can have in the future for media mediums.

Although, social media has become a poignant medium through which news can be spread and shared to masses of people, the audience that the medium attracts has major influences on popular culture. In the age of technological advancements, Americans have found that their mobile phones allow them to have media information easily accessible almost everywhere.

The extent of this trend was studied by Pew Research Center and their results are incredible. Some of their findings included that “ as of August 2017, two-thirds (67%) of Americans report that they get at least some of their news on social media – with two-in-ten doing so often” (1). When a whopping 67% of Americans get at least some of their news from social media, there is no doubt that the future of news is moving toward mobile, social media based mediums. This massive group that social media appeals to is beneficial in the sense that the news is shared with a so many people. When looking close into the study, the audience that social media attracts is mostly that of millennials and younger. Facebook has become a centerpiece for young groups to share news. In 2016, Pew Research Center did a study of the average age of Twitter and Facebook users. They found that for Facebook, “ some 36% of online adults ages 18-29 are on the social network, more than triple the share among online adults ages 65 and older (just 10% of whom are Twitter users)” (2). Their results emphasized the massive amount of younger adults who are active on social media. In addition to the majority of Facebook users being younger, “ a majority of those users get news on the site” (5). This shift in society's habits are cause for excitement due to the fact that now young adults are incentivized to stay up to date on news. Mainstream media outlets have, for years, been trying to get the younger audiences attention and this seems to finally be the solution we were looking for. However, it's not just the younger generations that are getting into social media. Pew Research Center also found that even “ older adults are joining in increasing numbers. Some 62% of online adults ages 65 and older now use Facebook, a 14-point increase from the 48% who reported doing so in 2015” (3). This profound study means that now it is not just the

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young who are into social media, but everyone is starting to get into it. Since the older population is starting to use social media, there is a larger group of people using social media than probably ever imagined. With this comes the perks of social media as the medium for news due to the broad and vast audience that social media attracts.

There are negatives to the audiences who gather news through social media platforms. While it's obvious the importance of staying in tune with the current news, it is also very important that both sides of an argument are viewed, known and understood. This is emphasized in research done by "The Journal of Economic Perspectives". They found that on Facebook, an average of a little more than 80% of user's friends and followers were of the same party affiliation, which means "Facebook friend networks are ideologically segregated" (8). This can cause the echo chamber effect which makes it extremely challenging for individuals to be aware of the other side of an issue. When the only news that appears in one's timeline echos their own political, sociological, or ideological beliefs, then they are only receiving part of the information and should take that new found insight and look into it further. This way, not only does one get a deeper and better understanding of a story or issue, but also valuable context can be gained by considering the opposite viewpoint of a story or issue. By staying in the echo chamber and making no effort to expand your knowledge on the news, consequences begin to occur. The Journal of Economic Perspectives emphasized major concern with one of their studies finding that even for false news stories, people are "about 15 percent more likely to believe ideologically aligned headlines, and this ideologically aligned inference is substantially stronger

for people with ideologically segregated social media" (8). This is saying that individuals are 15% more prone to believe in fake news stories just because that story is aligned with their beliefs. With the chance of fake news stories spreading, it's fair to say that this newfound medium does have its flaws. However, in integrating any new technology into society, there will always be issues at first but over time, I believe that the assets will outweigh the liabilities. With that being said, social media as a platform for news delivery must be approached with caution. If not there will be adverse outcomes. The downsides can cause lasting harm, especially with the recent boost in sharing of false news stories.

Social media is used by millions of people every hour. As a result, fake news can spread very quickly and if the medium isn't approached properly, there is an increase in risk of believing such news. Since the 2016 election, the term "fake news" has been repeated many times. The rhetoric surrounding the term has its issues, but the overarching idea is quite important. Despite this outcry for an end to the spreading of false news, it is not slowing down and will remain extremely dangerous. NewsWhip, a website dedicated to studying social media and its effect on people, tracked a fake news site earlier this year. They found that the site, Your Newswire, had "been responsible for a couple of the most viral stories of the year, and the data backs it up: Despite being fake, the site has accrued more than 3.5 million Facebook engagements in February 2018 alone. This means shares on web articles, and then additional likes, reactions, comments and subsequent shares to that content on Facebook" (6). NewsWhip only tracked the one website yet that one alone has had false news stories being shared millions

of times. With these news stories becoming viral, popular culture has not only become accustomed to them, but it could also reflect that we do not care for accurate information. The Journal of Economic Perspectives concluded their study's citing, " people who get news from Facebook (or other social media) are less likely to receive evidence about the true state of the world that would counter an ideologically aligned but false story" (8). If we accept false news because it backs one's ideological agenda, then it is catastrophic to the media's industry and the state of public knowledge. There is danger in the spread of fake news and it can have real harms, including a real life threatening situation that happened when someone believed in an untrue news story. In December, 2016, a man brought a semi-automatic weapon into Comet Ping Pong Pizza shop in Washington D. C after believing in a fake news story that had become viral that the pizza shop was involved in a sex abuse ring with Hillary Clinton. The Chicago Tribune reported that, " as the story spread, Alefantis and his employees received multiple death threats. The rumors culminated in December when a North Carolina man, Edgar Madisson Welch, came to the restaurant with a loaded assault rifle and handgun in what he called an attempt to investigate the claims. He fired the rifle several times while inside the restaurant, according to court documents" (8). This highlights the horrible outcomes that the spread of fake news can have on innocent people. The article goes on to say that one of the main contributors of the story was Alex Jones, a conspiracy theorist and YouTube personnel, and that he has since apologized for the incident (11). However, there is more that needs to change to ensure that something like this never happens again, because although no one got injured in this situation, it had the potential to be a lot

worse. The message in this medium is clear, the advancement of technology has drastically changed the way in which peoples gather information, and how reliable that information may be. With that being said, people are starting to change in order to prevent the spread of misinformation.

Misinformation is a serious constraint to social media as media mediums and the solution to the problem is still unclear. However, with a huge increase in popularity directed towards fake news and the consequences surrounding fake news, companies are trying to decrease the importance of the issue in a variety of ways. Facebook is trying to end, or at least slow down this issue as they created a new program to fact check fake news stories. “ The new system is expected to make it easier for users to flag and report stories that are misleading or false. Those stories will then be reviewed by third-party fact-checkers and labeled as potentially fake in the News Feed” (10).

Although this example may seem extremely simple, it still shows that the message in the medium is changing for the good. With Facebook's attempts in helping to end the issue of fake news, many others are starting to join the movement. The problem will only get worse unless action is done and even the government is getting involved. NBC wrote an article on fake news in Twitter citing “ that they examined 126, 000 stories tweeted by about 3 million people more than 4. 5 million times. They found that false news stories were 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories were” (7). That retweet percent is extremely high and due to researching the origins of fake news stories, the government has decided that the impact is affecting the United States political stage. The seriousness of the issue is exemplified by the fact that currently, “ Congress and the FBI are

investigating evidence that Russian and other foreign users deliberately flooded social media with untrue reports and posts intended to mislead people about political candidates” (10). When the magnitude of an issue is large enough that the FBI wants to get involved, the issue is of superior importance. The spread of fake news has sparked a complaint from the public and nearly every social media platform is being affected by it. However, through a societal based effort, the meaning of social media mediums for news is gradually changing to not only include a convenient platform to gather top stories from around the world, but also reliable, fact-checked information that is as reliable as the mainstream media.

Besides the audience it attracts and the falsehoods that it can spread, social media as a medium for mainstream news is causing more change in popular culture with the effect it is having on televised and newspaper based media outlets. McLuhan used the introduction of the railway as an example of how the medium is the message. He wrote that “ the railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure” (9). I think that analogy better shows the effect that social media is having. That although news outlets are nothing new, the development of social media as the medium for which news is shared is a game changer. Not only does it eliminate many of the negative normally found in mainstream media such as lengthy articles, conflicting timing of aired news, and limited options of outlets to watch or read, but it also allows a convenience and ease to checking up on the news that was not regularly there. Sage Journals

published a research article which emphasized this point by stating “ social media provide people with a new, cheap, quick, and convenient news source” (4). However, the mainstream media is feeling that cost, especially in the newspaper and televised media industries. That same research article from Sage Journals also found that “ people who are social media and mobile phone users are now less engaged in print newspaper and television as their source of news and spend much more time on receiving news via their mobile phones and social media” (4). Over time, the decline of print and televised news could end up destroying that industry. However, that is not necessarily a bad thing as societal and cultural changes are inevitable over time and with that, the news medium changes message. The research article concluded that due to the increased use of mobile and/or social media based mediums and the decreasing desire for newspapers and television media stations, the mainstream media expanded into the mobile news industry and with that, statistical evidence shows an increase in overall news engagement (4). The way in which we gather news is in the process of transforming. If the correlations from such studies stay significant, the increase in news participation will continue and in turn, a more knowledgeable population will arise.

In our ever changing world, the importance of being informed is more crucial than ever. With that comes the complicated yet fascinating trend away from the normal absorption of the news, to the new, risky but beneficial medium for news, a mobile, social media based medium. Social media mediums can be riddled with ideological segregation, viral false news stories, and corrupt foreign powers trying to influence our democracy. It is imperative to be

careful when using this new found medium as the consequences of not doing so can be very extreme, may that be in the form of a shooting or just a misguided population. However, the shift seems to only be getting stronger and more developed. With those downfalls comes change, and society is changing for the better with increases in young adult news participation, fact-checking of shared stories, and overall news engagement throughout the population. Mediums always carry a message and this message is that social media and mobile mediums for news are making the world a better place by providing a convenient, fast, and cost maximizing method to gathering important information for all to access.

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