Amateurism VS Professionalism: Who will prevail in the digital era?

Chosen stream: COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to highlight and explore the aspects from the rise of amateurism on the social media platforms. Web 2.0 has lowered the barriers towards content creation and with the aspects of participatory culture has brought forward the formation of communities online where people can exchange ideas and tips. In the contemporary world, anyone can have access to the tools for the content creation and tutorials available across social media. As a result, amateur content creators are progressively mastering the process of creating and distributing contents across diverse social media platforms. Produsers are the by-products of Web 2.0 which amplify the aspect of citizen journalism, self-branding, freelancing, microcelebrity and remediation. The social media platforms are overwhelmed by amateur contents which overshadow professionally created contents. Thus, this paper points out that there is hardly no clear distinction between amateur and professional content creators. Social media and online communities are causing a clash between professional and amateur content creators who are now dominating the attention economy and as a result, the line between amateurism and professionalism is blurred. Understanding the key aspects from online communities and social media will illustrate the factors that are causing a shift from professionalism to amateurism.

Keywords: #amateurism, #professionalism, #onlinecommunity, #socialmedia, #attentioneconomy, #contentcreation, #citizenjournalism, #self-branding, #freelancing, #microcelebrity, #remediation

Technology has changed the way humans interact socially, the integration of social media platforms with Web 2.0 has digitised the "third place" coined by Oldenburg (2013) which refers to physical places such as cafes and libraries where people of equal interest interact with each other. The aspect of convergence can be observed as people are transitioning to the online platforms and also, they are actively involved in the process of participatory culture whereby "produsers" are contributing to the creation of contents which are theorised by Henry Jenkins. Thus, barriers to artistic expression have been lowered and technological affordance has amplified the rise of amateur created contents which have overshadowed the

work of the professionals. It can be observed that amateurs are more favoured on social media platforms as they efficiently make use of the attention economy to grow. The interchange of collective knowledge through communities further boosts their development and the quality of their created contents is enhanced. Therefore, this paper argues that online communities and social media have caused the line between amateurism and professionalism to blur.

The role of Online Communities and Social Media in creating a networked self

A community is created when people sharing same interest group up on an online platform (Kim & Kim, 2017). Community has efficiently transitioned to the online platform, people have a way connect with each other through the use of social networks and media contents (Hampton & Wellman, 2018). While Dotson (2017) argues that technology has caused a decline in communities and strong relationship, all the previously stated authors are conflicting with this argument as they point out that there are even more communities online where people bond with each other as they share the same interest and ideologies. Members within a community helped each other by giving tips, sharing ideas, promotion of contents/self-branding and as a result the community grows bigger as more people join in to acquire this collective knowledge. Communities are made up of members which in the contemporary world are called produsers as they actively participate in the production and consumption of online contents (Maguire, 2015). Communities online make use of social media as a medium to gather people and make them participate in discussion and activities. An example could be gamers gathering on Discord or Reddit to discuss game strategies and updates. These online communities promote a sense of integration, equality and freedom as members can communicate with anyone regardless of their social status. However, they must abide to certain rules so that there are no hatred or toxicity happening among the members. Personal media production has become even more popular as the users are quickly adapting to new technology and social media platforms. To understand how technology play an important role for the growth of an amateur one must put himself/herself in the shoes of someone who wants to start a career as a content creator. The platform for content production can be in a form of a simple smartphone as it has been developed in such a way that everything has converged onto a single device. The quality of the camera matches the contemporary standards and there are free mobile applications that give the freedom to reshape the contents. Furthermore, the distribution of media can be done within the same device through various online platforms such as social networks, online forums, microblogs, image and video-sharing platforms. Thus, this illustrates

how it is easy for a beginner to start a career as a content producer. There is clearly a form of inequality imposed upon the professionals who must have at least a degree at university, expensive gears and licenses.

Online Communities and Social media contributing to freedom of information and expression

Online communities and social platforms are promulgating the production and circulation of amateur contents online, citizen journalism is a by-product of this sudden surge of contents online. Citizen journalism is perceived as a form of news production by the public through recorded events, photographs and text that they post online (Wall, 2015). Facebook and Twitter are common platforms for news circulation used by the public which imply the use of their smartphone to capture and share news spontaneously as they happen. Furthermore, social media platforms offer the option to produce live videos which can help to share events as they are happening instantly, while different online communities can share the link and further boost the viewership. The participatory aspect of online platforms has drastically impacted the news industry causing a decline in profitability as digital culture is dominating the scene (Rutten, 2018). Wall (2015) points out that there is a class of culture between professional and amateur journalism. The professionals in the news industry devalue the concept as citizen journalism as they perceive it as unethical, not news-worthy and untrustworthy. News companies are against this shift of power and must maintain higher authority against the amateurs in the industry. Jönsson & Örnebring (2011) reinforce the idea of Wall (2015) by stating that major news outlets are pressured by the aspect of participatory journalism. It is true that news companies have experienced a drastic impact with digitisation of news, decline in newspaper sales and viewership are some of the impacts but citizen journalism is measly responsible for these issues. Citizen journalism is more of a boon for the community as it is connected to civic participation (Nah, Namkoong, Record & Van Stee, 2017). Civic participation has led to the creation of non-profit organisations that are focused on news reporting. Anyone can become a journalist in the digital era as it does not require much computational skills to publish news online. As a result, freelance journalists have emerged and these news reporters are effective at surfacing newsworthy issues that are neglected by the professionals. Wall & el Zahed (2014) further supports the importance of citizen journalism by illustrating the context of editorial firmly controlled by the government in certain countries, the output of information is filtered and even censored. Thus, freelance

journalists shed light on imperialist acts occurring in these countries. Furthermore, the news industry seeks help from online communities and forums to acquire crucial information for their publications. This emphasises the aspect of collaboration between amateurs and professionals as information is a crucial element that cannot be neglected. Thus, news companies have set up a system whereby the public can submit newsworthy media such as text, photo and video while in exchange the creator of the content is either credited in the description or given a form of payment (Borger, van Hoof & Sanders, 2014). This incentive motivates the amateurs to actively participate in the news production and help the community. Even though citizen journalism entails uncertainties in terms of accuracy and authenticity it has proven to be part of the spectrum of professional journalism.

YouTube facilitating the process of production and proliferating the distribution of amateur contents

Content remediation is another element that has emerged from the produsers community, a rise of content creators has been observed in the YouTube community. Remediated media are conversion of an original text to another format with added edits (Bolter, 1999). Remediation is one of the most common practices that has propagated across social media platforms. It can exist in the form of memes, remixes and mashups that are usually created by basic amateurs. The process of remediating a text is simple and easy as anyone can reshape the media in any way they like by using free applications available on the internet. YouTube is a common platform where these types of media proliferate, tools and media contents available on this platform amplify the production and distribution of video contents. It is the most popular video streaming platform with a daily watch time of 1 billion and 68 million active users regularly (Dogtiev, 2019). This video streaming platform is made up of both amateur and professionals video creators. However, the most popular ones are the "amateur" video creators as they produce unique contents and are the most upvoted by the community. The professionals perceive them as amateurs as they apply basic knowledge of video production or even marketing strategies. However, the formats that they produce are more appealing to the general audience. The freedom of creating contents has its limits as the aspect of copyright infringement is omnipresent. Copying and redistributing media contents have been facilitated by new technology (Towse & Handke, 2014). Some professionals are against the aspect of content remediation as they have invested a lot of time and money into creating something which will later be remixed by an amateur who will acquire more fame and

money. Thus, measures have been taken to reduce the amount of copyright infringement such as the European Union has implemented new rules whereby platforms such as YouTube held liable for hosting copyrighted content without the proper rights and licensing (Feiner, 2019). Therefore, a massive decline in amateur created content has been observed on YouTube as their videos receive a copyright strike and permanently removed from the platforms. This has given more space for professionals and the regain in control of the attention economy. Even though YouTube has cleansed the platform it has given even more importance to aspects of community channels, creative commons and fair dealing which have alleviated the pressure on the amateur content creators. Community channels offer a chance to anyone to be featured as they make a compilation of videos from various creators on the platform and credit them at the end of the video or in the description. Creative commons and fair dealing provide the amateur content creators with the necessary tools such music, effects, stock footage, etc... to aid them with their video production for free. Thus, it is a clash between professionals and the YouTube community but there is no clear winner as statistics illustrate that the most subscribed channels pertain both professionals and "amateur" content creators who started with a basic knowledge of video product.

Amateurs causing content saturation on Instagram which renders professionals insignificant

In the digital era, photography has taken a new meaning with social media especially Instagram and new trends has surfaced such as vernacular creativity, Instafame, microcelebrity, selfies, etc. The use of photography has been focused towards creating "celebrities" rather than a tool for autobiographical remembering (van Dijck, 2008). The is where a clear distinction is set between amateurs and professionals, the purpose for taking a picture is different as professionals use it for advertising, storytelling and news reporting while amateurs use it as a way to promote their self-branding. In the industry of photography there is a lot of remediated vernacular creativity due to the rise in amateur photography through the introduction of handheld camera and social media business models (Edensor, 2009). Thus, the number of amateurs is increasing progressively as they acquire new technology to perform this daily practice. Instafame is achieved by getting more attention towards the created contents and promoting self-representation to gain the title of microcelebrity (Marwick, 2015). As a result, they employ strategies to gain more exposure such as using hashtags, brand promotion and paid Instagram promotion. Their feed is usually unorganized with selfies. Professionals use

Instagram as a portfolio to portray their creations and attract clients with their well organised feed that reflect their skills (Leaver, Highfield & Abidin, 2020). Thus, a well curated Instagram profile and feed is essential to the professionals in terms of business prospects. Saturation of content is eminent on this platform as everyone is engaged in the same activity which renders the hashtags useless as people make avail of random hashtags just to get the attention of the Instagram community. Furthermore, new technology has made photography even more accessible as smartphone cameras are as good as DSLR cameras and tutorials on photo editing are readily available online. Therefore, content created by an amateur is on par with the professionals. In the digital era, the power has shifted to the amateurs as professionals are perceived as expensive and slow in contrast to a cheap and efficient amateur (Cobley & Haeffner, 2009). There is no clear distinction between them, freelance photo editors coming from the amateur spectrum are stealing the jobs of the professionals. Photography is an easy and accessible process nowadays; professional photographers or photo editors are barely needed as knowledge of photography has been disseminated across the internet through video tutorials.

Conclusion:

In this paper we have explored and highlighted the major shift of power from professionals to amateurs in the digital era. Communities across social media networks reinforce the aspect of collaboration and collective knowledge which aid the beginners to grow and develop their skills, self-branding and popularity. Different aspects from citizen journalism, YouTube and Instagram have shed light on how professionalism and amateurism clash with each other which also help us to understand the importance of Web 2.0 into facilitating the approach towards content creation (text, photo, video). The amateur will progressively rise above the professionals as the barriers towards mastering the art of creating content online have been drastically flattened and new technology will always ease the learning process.

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