

The Development and Consumption of Social Media has Changed the way we Receive and Consume Breaking News.

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Abstract

Traditional media is struggling to keep up with the rapid development of new media that provides opportunities for users to participate rather than being passive. The paper reviews how the development of new media and the consumption of social media has changed the way users receive and consume breaking news. As newspapers face the question of how to keep alive, the relentless growth of digital media is increasingly outdating them which subsequently affects the theory of agenda-setting (Harper, 2010). As traditional agenda-setting allowed producers to be selective on what the viewers see and the order, they see it in. Though, with the development of social media affordances, consumers now have control due to having broader access to data and information (McCombs, 2006). The content that viewers may see can range from professional to non-professional news, also referred to as 'citizen journalism, a form of collaborative media that the average public may post to social media allowing journalists whether professional or not to further utilise the content (Wall, 2015). This type of content becomes highly prominent during disasters as social media plays a significant role through crisis response as it can allow emergency responders and the public to communicate whilst reaching large crowds promptly (Simon, Goldberg, & Adini, 2015).

Introduction

Social media usage has become the way users now consume breaking news or news updates in general. Both producers and consumers participate and rely on networks and social media to receive the latest updates from video posting of live events social network sites to updates through Twitter Tweets. Individuals in emergency conditions, utilise any means that are available to locate details (Mileti & Darlington, 1997, as cited in Luna & Pennock, 2018). Social media provides opportunities for engaging citizens in emergency management by both spreading information to the public and accessing information from them. Social media and collaborative technologies have become critical components of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery through pre-event, event and post-event processes (Luna & Pennock, 2018). Personally, throughout the Australian Bushfires, I utilised social media sites to share live images and pictures to not only alert families, friends, and the public surroundings but also officials and major news outlets that I may have been able to reach. The paper will cover the stream of online networks and social change discussing that the development and consumption of social media have changed the way we receive and consume breaking news. I discovered during my studies that the media, in effect, follows us around wherever we go, and we're increasingly becoming oblivious to its existence (Hirshberg, 2013).

New Media

Technology and the media are rapidly changing, and the traditional world is struggling to keep up. Previously, people would consume media by reading or looking at information that was handed to them on a certain timeline. Today's audience also expects to choose what they read and, in many cases, assume that they are capable of contributing content and perspectives as well (Harper, 2010). Both traditional and non-traditional news organisations report and comment on how the internet and social media, particularly social networking, have begun to have a significant impact on news organisations and the ways they function. The constant development of new media is slowly outdated newspapers as they become confronted with the dilemma of how to make papers viable. Hirshberg (2013) states that new media is constantly altering the media that emerged before it. Therefore, we can look at newspapers being overtaken through the internet distribution of content creators and user-generated content. New media has divided audiences whilst social media has seized the public's attention, hijacking the news and how they consume it (Hirshberg, 2013).

Agenda-Setting Theory

The steady development of new media has further led to critical problems with agenda-setting research. The conventional agenda-setting position of the media entails both the monitoring and collaboration roles of communication, drawing attention to daily new and significant topics whilst shaping cooperation on whether these issues should be prioritised (McCombs, 2006). There were only a few media sources during the broadcast

period resulting in the potential to attract a large audience as programming has a huge impact on the national agenda (Feezell, 2017). However, in the current media context, there are many more media outlets, allowing for media coverage to be tailored to particular audience members' needs, and thereby jeopardising the news media's previous abilities to influence the public agenda (Chaffee & Metzger 2001; McCombs 2005; Prior 2007; Williams & Delli Carpini 2011, as cited in Feezell, 2017).

These changes to traditional media have transformed the ways users consume news through personalised content and algorithms that this content is produced in. The algorithms limit what is seen on their feeds as they are based on what the users show interest in through liking, posting, re-posting media and search history on these platforms. Therefore, the consumers utilising the platform act as the main filter while the algorithms are the secondary filter as they become accustomed to the consumer's actions. This affects the utilisation of the agenda-setting theory as journalists and news outlets have lost the choice and control, they previously had on audiences, leaving the theory in question (Feezell, 2017).

Citizen Journalism

Nowadays the audience is participating more and more in the media rather than being passive. Communication and collaboration with producers and consumers have become easier through tools on social platforms. The broad development of these technological affordances within these platforms has made sharing news even simpler over time (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zuniga, 2013). As the internet continues to overtake newspapers and television it enhances users to participate in seeking news that interests them whilst allowing them to post news to social media. Social media plays an important role in news consumption as this form of user-created news is heavily relied on by not only other consumers but news outlets too. The incorporation of both professional and non-professional forms of news creates a form of 'citizen journalism' which is usually considered a sub-category of 'User-generated content' (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zuniga, 2013). This is a form of collaborative media where news content is produced by non-professionals (Wall, 2015). This content can be irregular posts along with a Twitter feed, capturing live events and posting it to social media or even the microlocal journalism where the news focus is on a small geographical scale or area. Pieces of information or even the entirety of content that has been created and posted by a user may be publicised further, for example on news channels where journalists can utilise the content as supporting evidence (Holton, Coddington, & Gil de Zuniga, 2013). Therefore, the experience of sharing information through social media becomes an integral part of online consumption.

Yes, of course, there are limitations to user-generated content and citizen journalism as we begin to question the credibility of these news sources. Though, citizen journalism is beneficial to contemporary media as events in rural areas can be brought to the news since mainstream media lacks reporters and reach in these areas (Chadha & Steiner, 2015). The assistance from citizen journalists for regional news organisations allowed

the opportunity for national journalism organisations to then gain local and regional connections or access. Citizen journalism becomes more apparent in the case of disasters where citizens, communities and platform users produce news and updates at a rapid pace.

Disaster Management

Mechanisms throughout disaster response continue to evolve alongside social media affordances which are a fast-growing part of disaster response (Simon, Goldberg, & Adini, 2015). When disasters occur, communication is a crucial part of emergency management as many organisations and agencies involved are trying to cover the event. This creates an overload throughout social network sites due to information-hungry users trying to access more answers. Information is dispersed to users whilst also accessed from users on social media sites which gives them the opportunities to engage in the emergency management processes.

It has been observed that social media use increases during a disaster as people are continuously seeking information (Luna & Pennock, 2018). There are critical factors to disaster management that allows the flow of news and information to consumers, journalists, and other users. These factors include preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, they can also be referred to through the three stages of 'Pre-Event', 'Event' and 'Post-Event' (Luna & Pennock, 2018). Through emergency management the sharing of information is a crucial communication tool as once updated information is received by consumers there is a high willingness to share, update and warn other friends, family, and community.

Social media provides a credible contact platform with the public, as well as effective and extensive data collection to increase situational awareness during rapidly changing circumstances (Luna & Pennock, 2018). Throughout the processes of emergency response, all users create, consume, and share information. During the Pre-Event process, social media is used to: send and receive disaster-related information. Disaster warning and detection is a part of the process from pre-event to event emergency management. During the Event process, users can also deliver and receive assistance requests, as well as notifying others of their location and current state (Luna & Pennock, 2018). The Event and Post-Event processes cover the documentation on how the crisis is unfolding whilst providing and consuming new material and disaster information for users. This can then lead to the receipt of donations, people who want to volunteer and providing health assistance. Eventually, the distribution of information about disaster relief and recovery would occur at the end of these processes. Connecting or reconnecting with community members, along with discussing cultural and empirical cause and effects, as well as responsibility, are all functions of the Post-Event phase.

In emergency management users can utilise social media platforms to post live videos and pictures that not only warn family, friends, and the community surroundings but also authorities and major news outlets. According to Goodchild, consumers function as

"sensors" that provide input during and in the conclusion of a crisis (Luna & Pennock, 2018). Those who are considered as "content creators" or "influencers" have a much larger reach to many different communities than the general public does. Therefore, when these influential members start to partake in delivering or sharing information to their page's awareness spreads further and faster.

Australian Bushfires and the Media

To conclude this paper, I wanted to communicate all this information into a personal example that my country had experienced in 2019. This is where I realised that I was no longer receiving information physically, i.e. Newspapers or the television, but through my very own Instagram feed. Awareness of the six million hectares that were burnt throughout Australia was brought through viral photos and videos. The escalating crisis captivated the world to such an extent that #AustralianFires trended on Twitter in 158 countries across the world (Mack, 2020). Mack (2020) found that on Instagram, over 62K posts were shared with the hashtag #AustralianBushfires, and TikTok content with the hashtag #supportingaustralia got over 2.1 million views. While Facebook has been criticised, it has proven to be a vital medium for not only communication and linking local communities to the rest of the world, but also for offering assistance for emergency crews. I also noticed that majority of my Facebook friends had utilised the safety check-in which is a tool from Facebook's 'Data for good' project.

The bushfires throughout Australia became very real to me when I began to see visuals of people fleeing their homes and what was left of these homes. I found that this type of content allowed me to feel more connected with my country, which then urged me to share to the majority of my profiles utilising relevant hashtags to reach a further audience. I found that through the online news articles I was reading, there were video attachments that I had seen on my social media feeds prior. News outlets were utilising the content that citizens were producing to their feeds. Citizen journalism tended to create an emotional response from social media users as it creates the feeling of being in the moment of a real and raw event, rather than the moment being described to us through articles. Visuals are powerful, they provide an experience and seek an emotional response out of the viewer.

Conclusions

While new media continues to develop, consumers continue to adapt and respond to these changes. The media's traditional agenda-setting role entails both the monitoring and collaboration roles of communication, bringing attention to new and important topics daily while shaping cooperation on whether these issues should be prioritised (McCombs, 2006). Media has not only taken control of the user's timelines and algorithms but also their daily lives in which they rely on these networks to feed them updates and worldwide events. Newspapers have rapidly become outdated as consumers can filter what they want to see by feeding the platform with what they are interested in through likes, comments and platform searches (Harper, 2010). In times of

disasters media platforms tend to become overflowed with news in correlation to the particular disaster, these may include updates and coverage from both consumers and producers. Users have also adopted social media affordances to now produce their own content and updates which has led professional journalists to question the credibility of this information. Professional journalists have attempted to protect their power and influence by demanding exclusive rights to news and other sources of media, thereby restricting others to content produce (Chadha & Steiner, 2015). But with the development of new media, the overthrow of the agenda-setting theory and essentially the wider access that consumers now have has hi-jacked news outlets and their journalists.

Platforms are utilised as an additional communication channel where users not only gain updates but can also post their own updates for friends, family and particular communities they may be a part of (Simon, Goldberg, & Adini, 2015). Networks can connect millions of users around the world which allows for the rapid transfer of information to other communities. The consumers, who were once neutral observers, are now cast in a more central and powerful position than ever before, changing the ways users consume, retrieve and perceive news (Hirshberg, 2013).

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