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Traditional VS New Media



Traditional VS New Media: An examination of news consumption patterns amongst media users

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Abstract

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has continued to increasingly fade the lines between the physical and technological worlds and has led to the growth of the new media over the years. The emergence of the new media to co-exist side by side with the traditional media has thrown up action points for research into the high-choice media environment the world is currently experiencing. Before the internet revolution, individuals relied heavily on the traditional media for news contents on politics, societal happenings and the state of affairs around them. This study sought to understand the patterns of news consumption in a high-choice media landscape, where people can choose to flip between options and preferences. The study's theoretical foundation is built on the postulations of Katz and Blumler's Uses and Gratification Theory, which argues that media users have needs that drive their media choices and how they consume media contents. Findings from the study reveal that the contemporary media environment has led us into the age of news repertoire, where news consumption is not monolithic, but instead, it is a combination of patterns. The study also finds that in the consumption of news in contemporary times, the traditional media seems to have slowed down, as individuals continue to indulge more in the new media. It concludes that the traditional media has not gone out of relevance, as it still supplies credible and reliable news. This heterogenous consumption pattern of news is called news repertoire. This defines the age we live in.

Keywords: Traditional Media; News; Uses and gratification; New Media

1. Introduction

This paper is an investigation into media preference for news consumption in the. The emergence of the New Media to co-exist in the same media climate with the traditional media has thrown up action points for empirical investigations, as to the pattern of media contents consumption amongst people worldwide. Before the advent of these technologies, the traditional media, comprising radio, TV, newspaper et al were infamous as the news media, making available information of consequences and interests to society. Audiences always knew that news and current affairs information will always be available for them on through these channels.

However, the growth of the internet as well social media has changed the dynamics of human communication as well as mass-mediated information dissemination and consumption. Researches in this area are also interested in understanding how much of a "medium of mass communication" is the new media, how does it impact consumption of media contents like news, music, entertainment, sports etc. How do people consume media contents? How do they actively sort for news? Where do look for entertainment from? Do they depend on the traditional media or the new media for education? These and many other questions have formed the crux of studies in this area.

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Lin et al (2005) state that not just journalism is undergoing transformation due to the internet revolution, also the pattern of news consumption by content receivers is changing, too. While the internet continued on its expansive rise through the early 2000s, Garrison (2005) did not mince words stating that the effect technology was going to have on journalism would be too powerful for journalism to remain static. This prophesy on changes in both distribution and consumption has turned to reality. Hindman (2008) avers that the around widely read 200 newspaper that existed in the U.S. at that time, had undergone a metamorphosis from just printing on black and white papers and inks, to also making news available to their readership base through their websites and social media platforms. Even with the rise of the new media, the traditional media still maintains its relevance as the major supplier of credible news, effective writing style, enjoys consumers' trust, best for reaching local audiences and will not just go away (Ottway, 2021; Lee & Capirni, 2010, Hindman, 2008; Quandt, 2008).

Negroponce (1995), in his book prophesied that the new media was going to arm individuals with the power to choose what they wanted to view or read and the sources that pricked their interests. Negroponce (1995) termed it the "Daily Me", constituted a worry to guardians of the traditional media, as the level of control message recipients held to determine what is and what is not news was seen as an erosion of the fulcrum of traditional media. News recipients have assumed some control, such that traditional media that appear in the internet allows users to personalize they see on the front pages of these sites.

This study will aim to achieve the following objectives:

- Understand the media preference of audiences (whether new or traditional media) in the consumption of news contents.
- Understand the reason behind the dominant choice of media selection for news consumption.

2. Methodology

The paper is a theoretical study, in which extant literatures in similar areas of study previously published were appraised to understand trends in this area. The study relies on secondary data from researches that focuses on news consumption pattern, media preference and media uses and gratification.

2.1. Conceptualizing Traditional Media and New Media

Traditional media encapsulates the media forms that blossomed before the advent of the internet. It usually encompasses typical news media: radio, television, newspaper and magazine. However, given how long they've been in circulation, books and films are considered as part of the old order. Richard (2021) refers to the traditional media as the old media, characterized by its ability to function as sources of information and communication. Messages from traditional media forms are usually controlled by the source and targets a specific audience. Ceil (2011) posits that the traditional media still represents a formidable force of importance to society. The traditional media, especially broadcast, was known for its power to make or mar politics and government, because of how trust these platforms had and the effect of its message. The 34th U.S. President, Dwight Eisenhower, as cited by Shaffer (1955) said broadcasting was growing as a might force with power to sway public opinion and predicted radio and T.V were going to grow even more powerful in its influence of people. However, Ceil (2011) avers that the new media is demystifying some of these powers of the traditional media, especially in strategic communications and its impact in politics and government.

On the other hand, new media is a product of the fourth industrial revolution sweeping the world. Schwab (2018) posits that the fourth industrial revolution is different from the first three revolutions, in how it is disrupting world systems to fuse the physical, digital and biological worlds through new technologies. These technologies are impacting all facets and sectors, communications inclusive. New media encapsulates internet and social media channels that are effectively creating a gateway for information access. Traditional media platforms are also embracing digital spaces, where they are now making their presence felt. According to Ceil (2011), new media are interactive media, that are built on the integration computers and multimedia. He posits that with time, the new media would also turn into old media; However, some media from the old order that has remained significant across generations, such as telephone, books, newspapers, would never go extinct.

2.2. Media Preference, Choices and Active Reception

A varying number of options are available for media consumers, and there is a greater freedom to switch in between choices, as a way of tailoring media needs. News is now at the beck and call of consumers. (Edgerly, 2017). Even though Prior (2007) disagrees to differential behavior in traditional and new media news consumption patterns, he

corroborates that Americans shuffle between choices of preferences in consuming media contents. Prior (2007) states that every day, on an average, Americans spend minutes juggling multiple TV content options: watching crime reports, seeking political news, learning golf from sport stations, improving cooking skills from food channels, shopping contents, sports contents etc. Ten years later, a 2017 Pew Research finds that the number of the study population that consumed news from print newspapers and the number that consumed news from the new media was almost equally divided. In 2018, a replicated research stated that the number of individuals who relied on the social media for news surpassed the number of those that depended on print newspapers (Shearer, 2018). This same study alluded that Television still remains the most popular medium, however it has been faced with declining viewership since 2018. These statistics does not put in jeopardy media content consumption via the new media nor traditional media, instead it testifies to a media climate, where individuals have abundant choices and are able to choose to meet their preference. One of the most important aspect of digital and new media emergence is the fact that it has solidified the place of two-way communication as a prominent part of the media consumption cycle. Digital media emergence did not just bring out the new media, it also aided in the multiplicity of contents and forms of the old media (Livingstone, 2015).

According to Webster (2014), with the advent of the internet, some of those who were just receivers of information, are now becoming social commentators, who are actively now involved in the news process. Reiterating this point, Abercomble & Longhurst (2003) offer that the new media has rejiggered the dynamics, such that there is now an entanglement between reception and production of media messages. Every individual in society can directly or indirectly be referred to as part of the audience and simultaneously still be referred to as message producers, because technology has provided user-friendly interfaces for individuals to publish, comment and contribute to happenings around them. In what they termed "we media", Bowman & Willis (2003) explain how audiences around the world have become active, to the extent of being shapers of the news and information around the world. In South Korea, news website, which enjoys around 2 million daily readers, OhMyNews makes available news to citizens of the Asian country and at the time, citizens can also publish news stories on the website, on their own accord. Less than half a decade after it was launched, the website posed a threat to existing media platforms in the country, utilizing the new media and its power to pull community together to create a virtual army of citizen journalists (Bowman & Willis, 2003). This type of media climate means recipients of messages are active, rather than passive. The emergence of the digital media has accelerated the availability of options for audiences to choose from. In his text on theories, McQuail (1997) postulates that traditionally, audience's role was of passivity, having to only receive messages. However, he puts that this role has changed over the years and especially with digital media providing for more options and choices, it has made it easy for a more active audience followership. While audience can still make choices in-between options, Cooper & Tang (2009) state that audience passivity or activity is not solely based on media plurality, but also on structural and individual variables of pre-existing consumption habit and accessibility to a particular medium.

The early conception of the word "audience" translated to mean a set of message receivers who were seen as "targets" of media information, waiting to be "hit" with information which worked on them like a "magic-bullet" (Zhao, 2018:133). Mediated information were pointed towards targets (audience), who were seen as passive and having no filters to the information targeted at them and thus every intended aim of the message from the message producer is achieved (Zhao, 2018).

Early media researchers popularized the concept of audience, and as time went on, those who receive media messages generally referred to themselves as "audience" (Schram, 1955; McQuail, 2010). Arguments from McQuail (2010) states that media message receivers cannot be described as an audience because the term represents a set of individuals who are passive listeners and attentive to a performance, in a public-like setting or event. This description does not fit with message recipients in the mass-mediated communication process. Media message receivers in contemporary times are active in their consumption and they enjoy a multiplicity of information sources. This is why they can make choices based on preferences from the high-choice media climate.

With message recipients empowered to also be content producers, news writers, social commentators, citizen journalists etc, traditional news media is facing unprecedented times, with the power of practitioners to be gate-keepers now watered down by the very audience they serve, just as media institution's hegemonic power. Digital technology has provided powerful publishing tools, smart devices, fast computers that have transformed the practice of journalism (Bowman & Willis, 2003).

America witnessed a period where news consumers became news producers in an unprecedented manner, after the 9/11 attacks. Americans and the rest of the world sought for a full grasp of what had happened and different accounts of events from eye-witnesses, experts, government etc. A lot of people who were not trained journalists but had first-hand experience narrated their story to journalists and some of them went on to publish stories, experiences, commentaries, photo galleries about the attack on the internet. Traditional news sites suffered crashes due to the heavy

amount of traffic on these sites at the time and individuals resorted to e-mails, weblogs for find information on the internet about the attack (Pew Research, 2002).

3. The Age of News Repertoire

According to Heeter (1985), media repertoire emanated from the use of the phrase “channel repertoire.” The latter term referred to an aggregation of channels viewed in a particular household or by an individual. News repertoire entails the combination of media platforms and institutions to consume news in a hybrid fashion. This form of consumption thrives due to the high-choice nature of the media climate currently (Geers, 2019; Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012). News consumption was a function of exposure to the traditional media, but the advent of the new media has accelerated the combination of both consumption methods (Geers, 2020). Garrison (2005) predicted that due to the rapid spread of broadband and multimedia, online newspaper was bound to evolve as it has done in the first decade of internet existence. This because the overwhelming power of the new media, would not allow for a static state of newspapers, without its metamorphosis. Another landmark study that further reiterates the prime age of news repertoire activities was conducted by Pew Research Centre (2011) and cited by the New York Times (2011), postulates that even though a majority of original news reports still emanates from the traditional media, the new media accelerates the possibilities of citizens’ actions having an influence on the story’s impact.

In spite of the repertoire of news media available for consumption, Patterson (2008), posits that comparatively, young Americans of today are not as interested in news, when juxtaposed with the young Americans of two generations ago. This assertion is corroborated by Prior (2007), who states that the potpourri of options available to media audiences has made it easy for individuals to switch from news media channels to entertainment-providing channels with just the flip of a hand and the pressing of a button. Entertainment channels, which provides more fun has entertainment seekers hooked and for the section of the audience that seeks news, they have more options to explore. The bottom line is that, this creates a knowledge gap in between both sets and establishes political apathy and active participation between them. Lee & Yang (2014) state that the average knowledge of young citizens about political and public affairs issues have not risen despite the proliferation of news media through repertoire. Thus, this has led to more research concerns for scholars investigating knowledge gap, in an era of media repertoire. Even as more options are available for media recipients, the knowledge gap might get boldened between news junkies; those who are actively looking for news and switchers; those who wo not pay much attention to news (Prior, 2007; Lee & Yang, 2014).

4. Media Uses and Gratification: In Theory and Practice

Uses and Gratification theory explains the relationship between the media and media message recipients. It captures the uses and motives of media, as well as gratification obtained. The theory was propounded by Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz in 1974, following the publication of “The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives to gratification research”.

The theory argues that media users are not passive, but instead they are active in deciding what media they choose and use. The theory postulates that media users have particular needs that drives their media choices. Users sought out for media (radio, TV etc) or contents (shows, film etc) that meets and fulfil their needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). It is incumbent on media users to find their gratification from the media, while the media compete with themselves for the attention of users. Katz lists the motives for media use as an action to meet the following needs: affective needs, cognitive needs and social integrative needs. On the other hand, Blumler puts that the media exists to help users achieve the following: diversion and/or escapism, companionship and development of personal and social relationship, value reinforcement and exploring personal identity, societal surveillance and obtaining knowledge about happenings in the world. Offering his view, McQuail (2010) offers the four reasons behind how and why we choose the media as: personal identity, information, integration and social interaction, as well as entertainment. This theory simply supports the notion of a high-choice media climate where individuals are solely in charge of what they receive from the media.

According to Prior (2007), since 1980, the proliferation of TV channels (cable and satellite) created a heterogenous media consumption environment, that is built on people’s choice. The high-choice media environment has promoted the habit of people now having to watch what they enjoy and not what is available.

5. Conclusion

Evidence from reviewed literature of this study has shown that we live in an age of proliferation of media choices and individuals are highly in charge of what they expose themselves to (Geers, 2019; Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012). The

advent of the new media through the meteoric spread of the internet means people now have varying options to choose from. In consuming news in contemporary times, the traditional media seems to have slowed down, as individuals continue to indulge more on the new media and internet. However, the traditional media has not gone out of relevance, as it still supplies credible and reliable news, that is most times the news content circulated on the new media. This heterogenous consumption pattern of news media is called news repertoire. As shown by extant literatures (Patterson, 2008; Prior, 2007), this suggests the current pattern of news consumption. A corroborative study from Pew (2018) showed that in Western Europe, while TV and the new media are popular, people rely on a combination of different platforms for news. The new media is famed for being a medium that delivers news in a quick and timely manner to recipients, thereby appealing to younger generations. The traditional media has also maintained its relevance by delivering quality and trustworthy news.

However, in terms of the amount of time spent consuming news, reviewed literatures point towards the new media as having news seekers hooked a lot more, than the traditional media. Evidences from Pew Research Center (2016) showed that for the first time, the number of individuals who sought for news online surpassed the number of those who sought for news from print newspapers. This is a further testament to changing times, consumption pattern, and perhaps changing preference of media choice for news consumption.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The author has no conflict of interest.

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