







ISSUES FACING
COMMUNICATION
FOR ONLINE
JOURNALISM IN A
SOCIAL MEDIA
SOCIETY

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CCI500 - ASSESSMENT TWO

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INTRODUCTION

The distribution of news has undoubtedly changed with the advancement of technology. Journalism has evolved from primitive drawings and sketches to the rise of exclusively online based content. It has grown from paper, ink and printing to live updates at someone's fingertips. Following the invention of the World Wide Web in the 20th century, 'social media' was also born. This platform has completely transformed the way journalists distribute news and the way it is absorbed by audiences. There's no question that the rise of social media helps to connect people across the globe, in a way that has never been seen before, with the mere click of a button. Communication has never been more accessible. However, this extraordinary tool, which has produced the entity of 'online journalism' has its issues with regard to communication. The question to be asked is "how is social media impacting the spread and consumption of news?" This briefing paper will discuss this issue and outline the implications for communicating, through the use of a PEST analysis.

PEST ANALYSIS

POLITICAL

The rapid advancement of social media has given politicians a new tool to circulate their policies and thrust their name into the spotlight. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer the new technological generation an immediate interaction with politicians, and vice versa. However, as Denis Muller explains, “if ever there was a two-edged sword in politics, social media is it” (2018).

A communication issue, that is a direct consequence of social media, is the speed that false news stories are able to be spread. This was particularly shown throughout the 2016 U.S presidential election. In the final months of the campaign, more ‘fake news’ stories were shared on Facebook than stories from mainstream organisations (Silverman, 2016). The phrase ‘fake news’ was dubbed Collins English Dictionary’s 2017 word of the year, but the term’s evolution has become, as expert on social media Claire Wardle puts it, “weaponized” (Compton, 2018, para. 12) and is increasingly used as a term for politicians to describe reporting they simply don’t like. Allcott and Gentzkow describe social media websites as unfiltered and unedited, and it’s been suggested that Donald Trump would not have been elected president, were it not for the influence of ‘fake news’ (2017, p. 212).

E C O N O M I C

As news organisations attempt to keep up with developing technology, and the growing importance of social media, positions in newsrooms have changed, with adverse effects for some. The ABC, for example, undertook a restructure to focus more on digital and multi-platform journalism, which resulted in major job cuts. The then managing director, Michelle Guthrie, said the cuts were necessary to remain relevant to audiences (Knott, 2018). The consequences of building a more technologically savvy news service proved dire for its employees who were made redundant, or simply lost their jobs (Meade, 2018).

In terms of economics, social media is continuing to force changes to online journalism. When social media is the main form of communication e.g online journalism, there are negative economic consequences. Following media ownership laws being changed in September 2017, Australian media companies Fairfax and Nine announced they will be merging to create a new media giant. The end result will be a \$4 billion company and it may force other companies to merge, in order to remain profitable (Barker, 2018). The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance expressed concern over the move, due to the impact on independent journalism, as well as on the thousands of Fairfax employees (2018).

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S O C I O C U L T U R A L

According to Oxford Dictionaries, citizen journalism is, by definition, the dissemination of news especially by means of the internet. This, along with statistics showing 17% of Australians rely on social media as their primary news source (Deloitte, 2018, p. 17), could according to Andrew Trounson, create an “echo chamber” where people’s prejudices are endlessly reinforced (2016, para. 9). This has a great effect on communication in online journalism as it creates extremely biased articles which are taken for fact.

The progression of social media has allowed the development of what’s called ‘citizen journalism’. “There are few content restrictions to publishing online, and those previously defined as the audience can, in theory, become the producers of news” (Mythen, 2010, p. 47, para. 3). Social media has played a substantial role in developing citizen journalism, which in turn, has its advantages to the field, but what sort of impact does it have on communication in online journalism? Mythen says citizen journalists are less restricted and not as self-regulated in their output compared to professional journalists, and it can lead to defamatory articles or social media posts (2010, p. 52, para. 1). In the U.S, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders accidentally promoted an altered video of a CNN journalist, allegedly acting inappropriately during a news conference with President Donald Trump (Wall Street Journal, 2018). The altered post, whose author is known for conspiracy-theory videos on a far-right website, was shared over 10,000 times.

TECHNOLOGICAL

Most journalists have social media profiles, and regularly post updates of daily and breaking news, but similar to politicians, this has exposed them to instant criticism in their communicative methods. Jayeon Lee writes that the social media behaviour of journalists can hurt their professional image, and it can even extend to their news organisation (2015, p. 317, para. 6).

In 2015, SBS presenter Scott McIntyre was fired for a series of personal tweets relating to Anzac Day. An unfair dismissal case ensued, with the news organisation claiming he had been sacked, not for exercising free speech, but for violating the SBS code of conduct and social media guidelines (Hall, 2015).

Employees getting fired over personal social media posts affects many industries, and **this** opens the door to the debate around free speech and the limits of using employer-linked social media accounts to express personal views.

IMPLICATIONS FROM KEY ISSUES

Political

It's difficult to define 'fake news' because the term is constantly evolving. It can range from poor journalism, like misleading headlines, to the term being used by figures such as politicians to discredit news media they don't like. As Park, Fisher, Fuller and Lee put forward, the increasing occurrence of false news stories is creating distrust in the media, and consequently, online journalism is suffering (2018, p. 37). Fake news is largely synonymous with Donald Trump, but the phrase is spreading to Australian democracy (Barlow, 2018). Elaborate!

Economic

The Nine and Fairfax merger will allow both enterprises to pool their assets and adapt to the changing environment of the media. It ensures a "future profitability as a merged company" (Barker, 2018, para. 6). But it comes at a cost, with 144 jobs being lost, as well as the risk of reduced media diversity. Cutting jobs to keep up with technological advances has the potential to compromise a journalism core ethical value: independence. Social media interaction enables greater contribution between audience and content but as Poell and van Dijck point out, "metrics-driven news production clearly compromises journalistic independence and, consequently, journalism's ability to function as the Fourth Estate" (2014, p. 191, para. 2).

Sociocultural

Sir William Berkeley in 1671 said:

I thank God, we do not have free schools nor printing; and I hope we shall not have them these hundred years. For learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world; and printing has divulged them and libels against the government. God keep us from both (cited in Lambie, 2014, p. 10).

It's an interesting point that relates today to citizen journalism. Social media is essentially 'free printing' that has therefore allowed anyone the ability to call themselves a journalist. As Trounson states, "social media gives everyone access to a platform" and is "no longer the preserve of the privileged few in the established media" (2016, para. 24). It's had unfortunate consequences for online journalism because there is now an increased chance of spreading unchecked, or in some cases false, news articles. It's possible the continuation of unregulated journalism, could introduce distrust in the media, especially for online journalism.

Technological

Any impediment of free speech in our modern society should be considered an issue in communication. Thomas Hughes says "the decline in media freedom coincides with the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter" (2017, para. 9) and it's an ironic turn of events for online journalism. While social media can play a big role in communication progression between news organisation and audience, it also creates barriers to free speech which in some cases, cannot be crossed without dire consequences due to social media guidelines.

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