



## Is Social Media the New News Media?

There have been many social and cultural shifts as a consequence of new media technology. This has had an effect on nearly every aspect of our social lives, including news, the ways we receive it, and what we do with it. Traditionally, the mass media has provided us with the information we receive about the world and played a crucial role in the public sphere (Habermas).

Clearly, all information is not reported and so what constitutes 'news' is selected and processed.

But how is news content selected? Someone is responsible for the selection and the angle taken.

The information in this Factsheet would be relevant to exam questions on the media. You may find it useful to look at Factsheets 57, 58, 150, 170 and 182 in conjunction with this Factsheet.

### How Has News Reporting Changed?

It could be argued that the onset of the internet and 24-hour news channels has increased choice of stories exponentially.

Traditionally news would be produced by the mass media and consumed by the audience. However, the development of new technology has meant that this has shifted, and consumers can now produce news, whether this is photographs or footage uploaded from smart phones to give a visual aspect to a news story, or articles written by citizen journalists, or comments on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. It could be argued that the audience can now produce news for the audience.

Citizen Journalism is the collection, dissemination, and analysis of news and information by the general public, especially by means of the internet.

Therefore, rather than news editors being responsible for the selection and writing of news stories, the general public play an active role in this.

#### Activity:

1. Watch a television news programme (e.g. BBC 6pm News or Channel 4 7pm news) and see if there is any evidence of footage from citizen journalists.
2. Look up some recent news stories that have included footage from citizen journalists – is it easy to find these stories? Is it reasonably common to see footage such as this? Write up your findings.

It is also the case that news is now instantly available from almost anywhere in the world due to new technology: smart phones, internet, websites, satellite phones and cameras, email, Facebook, Twitter, news on digital television etc. It is therefore, imperative now in the global market that news providers compete to survive. The companies need to tailor the way the news is presented to the audiences – as they

need to not only be attracted but retained. News reports need to be short, simple and snappy. This certainly helps to attract a younger audience.

Traditional journalism is being transformed by citizen journalists. Rena K. Bivens (2008) argues that mobile phone footage at the scene of news events, commentary via publicly accessible blogs, and online criticism of mainstream news output has increasingly been used to expose offensive, illegal or corrupt activities by politicians, celebrities, the police and armed forces and public and private institutions which are worthy of public condemnation. According to Bivens, citizen journalism has made their activities far more accountable to the public.

#### Activity:

It would appear that citizen journalists using social media and having input into traditional media is a good and positive thing. Do you see any potential pitfalls or issues? Complete a table similar to the one below to summarise the advantages and disadvantages of citizen journalism.

Advantages of citizen journalism	Disadvantages of citizen journalism
...	...

**Exam Hint:** Practice developing an argument with advantages and disadvantages. This skill can be used throughout the different sociological topics.

More and more people are uploading news related stories to YouTube, where they attract large global audiences. These news stories can go viral, where they will be seen by millions of people in a reasonably short time. The consequence of this, is that mainstream media organisations find it difficult not to cover news stories they might have once been ignored. New technology is therefore giving citizen journalists opportunities to shape what is put out through mainstream news organisations – there is a shaping of the mainstream news agenda.

### Decline in Newspaper Sales

Sales of newspapers have been falling steadily for a number of years.

Statistics from the *Audit Bureau of Circulations* show the following numbers (see the table on Page 2). Note that the numbers shown are the average circulations for January of that year.

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Newspaper	2010 circulation	2018 circulation
The Sun	3,557,336	1,545,594
Daily Mail	2,353,915	1,343,142
Daily Mirror	2,270,543	583,192
The Times	726,349	440,558
Daily Star	502,647	391,998
Daily Telegraph	1,039,749	385,346
Daily Express	1,050,846	364,721
The Guardian	401,560	152,714

It is clear, that these numbers show big falls in the sale of newspapers between 2010 and 2018.

**Exam Hint:** Giving some idea of trends shown in statistics is useful in exams.

**Activity:** Do some research at your school/college/home environment (as wide as you can set it up), to ascertain whether you can verify the dropping sales of newspapers. Try to include both quantitative and qualitative data.

### Decline in television viewing for news events

Fewer people use television for news now too. According to Richard Sambrook (2016) Professor of Journalism & Director of Centre for Journalism Studies at Cardiff University, television viewing in countries like the UK have declined by 3 to 4% on average since 2012. These declines are directly comparable to the declines in print newspaper circulation in the 2000s and if compounded over ten years will result in an overall decline in viewing of 25 to 30%.

Television is still an important medium and will remain so for years to come, but it will not be the dominant force it was in the second half of the twentieth century.

He also found that the viewing among younger people is far more pronounced both for television viewing in general and for television news specifically, meaning that the loyalty and habits of older viewers prop up overall viewing figures and risk obscuring the fact that television news is rapidly losing touch with much of the population.

**Activity:** Do some research to see if Professor Sambrook is right. Interview your fellow students to find out where they get their news stories from? Write up your findings, evaluating Sambrook's argument.

### Increase in Social Media for News Events

Despite the decline in traditional methods of obtaining the news, there is a growing use of social media to both access and spread news. There is an expectation now that it should be possible to access news anytime and anywhere – through mobile phones, laptops, tablets and computers.

It is commonplace now for social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to spread news stories globally and to shape the reactions of people through commentaries.

The audiences are huge for these social networks. In the first quarter of 2018:

- Twitter had 336 million monthly active users.
- Facebook had 2.19 billion monthly active users.
- YouTube has over a billion users, almost a third of all people on the internet.

These figures will very probably continue to increase. What this tells us though, is that social networking sites reach enormous numbers of people globally, and have the power to literally sway opinion, change minds and make ideological shifts.

**Activity:** What might be the potential pitfalls of this? List your concerns (if you have any) before reading on.

### Example of Social Media and News Reporting

#### President Donald Trump

An Independent newspaper headline from 22/10/2017 by Chris Baynes asserts Donald Trump says he would not be President without Twitter. Trump is quoted 'When somebody says something about me, I am able to go bing, bing, bing and I take care of it. The other way, I would never get the word out.'



In the article, the US leader said that social media was a tremendous platform that allowed him to bypass what he claimed was unfair media coverage and speak directly to voters.

**Activity:** Do some research into the election campaign of Donald Trump. How influential do you think social media was in his election as US president?

**Activity:** Find some stories based around a Trump tweet and look at how the traditional media treat them. On average, are they treated positively or negatively?

However, tweets by Trump have contained factual inaccuracies and personal attacks. In March 2017, he claimed that Barack Obama (the previous President) had ordered Trump Tower in New York to be wiretapped – an allegation Obama denied and for which both the Justice Department and FBI said there was no evidence.

Donald Trump has frequently claimed that the traditional media puts out 'fake news', and this is another reason why he uses Twitter, so that he can 'get the truth out there.'

**Exam Hint:** Using contemporary evidence will be awarded in your exam answers

### What is Fake News?

Fake news is news, stories or hoaxes created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers. Usually, these stories are created to either influence people's views, push a political agenda or cause confusion.

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With traditional news sources, journalists and media outlets were required to follow strict codes of practice. However, the internet has enabled a whole new way to publish, share and consume information and news with very little regulation or editorial standards.

As many people now get news from social media sites and networks it can be difficult to tell whether stories are credible or not. Information overload and a general lack of understanding about how the internet works by people has also contributed to an increase in fake news or hoax stories. Social media sites can play a big part in increasing the reach of these type of stories

All the following were headlines for fake news stories in 2017:

- Queen Elizabeth removes Obamas from Royal Wedding Guest List.
- Trump’s Health Deteriorating as White House Pressure Mounts.
- Iceland Pays Women \$5000 Per Month to Marry Immigrants.
- Obama and Michell to Divorce.
- Illegal Immigrants Started California Wildfires.
- Ex-Wife Ivana Claims Donald Trump is Addicted to Penis Enlargement Pills.



**Activity:** Look at the list of fake news stories above and try to list them in order of seriousness – the ones most likely to do harm/damage. Then list the possible outcomes of those stories, if people believe them in large enough numbers.

On the website [www.factcheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org), a featured post – *How to Spot Fake News* – it is argued that fake news is not a new phenomenon, but now bogus stories can reach more people, more quickly because of social media. This prompted both Facebook and Google to announce that they will crack down on fake news sites, restricting their ability to attract advertising revenue.

**Activity:** Do some research into how both the press and broadcast news are regulated. Could this same regulation be applied to the internet and social network sites do you think? What might the implications be?

It would appear, that to some extent social media is the new news media. Huge numbers of people appear to be getting their news fix daily from social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter etc., and this has had implications for traditional media news sources, both print and television – as audiences continue to dwindle. However, this cannot be seen as a wholly good thing, as both President Trump’s use of Twitter and fake news, cause issues on a daily basis. It remains to be seen if regulation of any sort could have an effect at all on fake news. Whilst this situation is on-going and unresolved we should be skeptical in some measure when consuming news stories from a multitude of sources. However, this is something we should do ordinarily anyway, as all news is selected and edited, and agendas are set on a daily basis. You might argue that news put out on social media is no different.

**Activity: Is social media the new media?**

Create a table like the example below... Look at both sides of the argument here!

Yes it is	No it isn't
<i>More people access the news through websites such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.</i>	<i>Older people still access news via traditional media e.g. newspapers.</i>
...	...

**Exam Hint:** There is a lot of information in this Factsheet that could be used to answer questions on the media. This information could be used when answering questions on ownership, news selection, ideological aspects of news and audiences and news.

Think about how you could use the information in this Factsheet in the following questions:

1. Analyse two ways in which the new media may affect the political process.
2. Outline and explain two ways in which new media differs from traditional media.
3. Outline and explain two ways in which the new media might benefit individuals.

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