

Smartphone Changes News Consumption and Production

INTRODUCTION

In the past, people used to consume news with mass media such as newspaper, radio and television. They present separate media forms, as newspapers provide written words and photos, radio transmits acoustic sounds and television have videos. Later, when PCs and smartphones emerged, all the forms converged.

The world's first smartphone, "Simon Personal Communicator" by IBM, made its debut in 1992, including a touchscreen, notepad, email client, calendar and a message box. However, it was the introduction of iPhone in 2010 along with the popularization of 3G technologies that brought the first real change to the smartphone market (Naughton, 2017). From then on, smartphones have become more than a high-tech toy of the rich, but also something that ordinary consumers could own. In addition, Molyneux (2017) pointed out that smartphones are distinguished from other cellular phones by having large screens and the ability to run advanced applications using software akin to a computer operating system. Thanks to the App Store and similar platforms, people may find any category of mobile application for almost every aspect of daily lives, just like a mini-PC in one's pocket.

The research idea is based on the aphorism of McLuhan, namely "the medium is the message". The idea that the medium having a direct influence on the society rather than simply carrying content will be the foundation of this project. This paper will demonstrate how the invention of the smartphone revolutionized the consumption of news, and how the change of news consumption further influences the change of news production. Also, whether these changes are caused by technology factors or culture factors will be discussed.

ANALYSIS

The invention of smartphones, as more portable PCs, revolutionized how people receive messages. With smartphones in pockets or somewhere within reach, people can always have immediate access to unlimited information right at their fingertips.

The convenience and accessibility of smartphones are not bound by time or location. Newman et.al (2017) found out that smartphones are now as important for getting news inside the home as outside. Up to 46% of smartphone users now access news in bed, which is much higher than using the device when commuting. Audience does not have to wait until a certain “TV news” period to watch what is happening today, but can receive the news by simply browsing their smartphones at their sofa, kitchen, bed, or even bathroom.

Therefore, television or radio news stations are losing their power to attract audience for their relatively low convenience. Legacy media have responded quickly to this change, putting more resources on mobile news. In this way, smartphones have become an extension for media to disseminate their news content. For example, Wall Street Journal do not only want more print subscription, but also try to provide cheaper and more accessible opportunities for their digital membership. Furthermore, media outlets which already focused on online journalism, such as Bloomberg, are now developing their news apps, disseminating newsletters through email, which enable stories to travel at a much higher rate from senders to receivers.

News providers are using smartphones for reporting

Considering the low barrier and convenience of smartphones, news consumers nowadays are adopting smartphones as the main channel for information. In response to this change, journalists are switching from using heavy devices to the portable smartphones for reporting, which provide digital-first news stories, lower the latency of transmission.

Every time the National People’s Congress of China is held in Beijing, reporters with heavy cameras and microphones have great burden when they are facing a surge of people. In contrast, some of them would use light-weighted, portable smartphones and earphones, also livestreaming on social media. As a result, they look more elegant and sharp, also speeding the news transmission which starts from the Great Hall of People and ends up in every corner of the world.

On the other hand, when breaking news happens, smartphones enable reporters to “get rid of” photographers and cameramen. Videos shoot on phones can be transmitted quickly to the office for further editing work within several clicks. The notion of “office” is also becoming relatively unimportant because

journalists can get their work done all by using their smartphones to connect at the home office and on the spot.

Apart from how professional journalist works with changes, the rise of citizen journalism is also worth mentioning. The concept has expanded from online content creation to citizens' participation in the news process (Goode,2009). Thousands of ordinary people started using smartphones to film what they saw. Reporting also became a basic act of resistance for ordinary Syrians in their revolution against Assad regime because Syrian president has tight control on the freedom of the press. Today, most of the western journalists covering Syria are based in Beirut or Turkey, and have several semi-permanent sources from citizen journalists inside Syria.

The blurred line between production and consumption

What makes the digital media revolution unique is its tendency to create new communities and “flatten” global culture (Friedman, 2008). As digital media, smartphones allows users to interact actively. Those who consume news from legacy media can also “produce” news stories on social media. Smartphone revolutionizes the world of “mass media”: media is no longer a one-way deal, from top-down to mass markets. It has become networked, allowing many-to-many conversations (Kovarik, 2011).

According to Hadland (2014), user generated journalism distinct from professional and citizen journalism. People who do not intend to report news but share information on platforms like social media are considered to create user-generated content (UGC), which is raw and unedited material sent by amateur eyewitnesses who happened to be there. In 2005 London bombing, when a man-made disaster took place underground, a lot of footages become available thanks to the wide usage of people's smartphones.

However, the credibility of news is endangered. Recent smartphones do not have such high quality for taking video or photograph as digital cameras do. The authenticity of blurred images or shaky video shoots may be questioned. Furthermore, although immediate transmission reduces the latency, social media like Twitter and Facebook help amateur journalists convey some biased ideas, and contribute to the spread of fake news.

It cannot only blame for technology. Citizen journalists and UGC journalists do not receive training and may convey wrong information unintentionally. Events like the Arab Spring also suggests that this blurring line is also caused by normal people's increasingly caring attitudes toward the society.

With the help of smartphones, people are getting high exposure to news but they spend limited time on it, pushing media to attract audience attention

With the diffusion of iPhone in 2007, smartphones as well as the mobile internet have found their way into everyday life. Research done by Taneja et.al (2012) found that the use of mobile media is common during commuting and at work. Dimmick et.al (2011) also found that mobile news is consumed extensively everywhere, especially in the interstices and on transportation. People have their smartphones with them on nearly every occasion. As exposure time has increased, so has the probability of getting news notices on their smartphones. In this case, technology is the main cause of the change.

Moloyneux (2017) pointed out that whatever content is presented, the news on smartphones ought to fit into consumers' schedules. The average timespan people spend on mobile news was less than 12 minutes. A study by Nieman Lab from Harvard University measured the time participants spend with their eyes fixated or engaged. It reveals that compared with computers, people spend less time on news story content, and are less likely to notice links when they are on smartphones. Mobile device can increase access to news but not necessarily increase deepen the understanding of the news.

Due to the high exposure but fragmented attention of audience, media has changed their production strategies to catch attentions. One strategy is to produce quick headlines and briefings which mainly tell what happened but hardly goes deep inside the stories. In other words, investigative stories are abandoned because they demand a lot of time of reading which the audience is not willing to spend, and thus media outlets do not want to pay for the stories with high cost as well.

What is more, new formats are developed. News media are seeking ways other than simply providing words and photos. Based on data analysis and visualization skills, Financial Times adopted creative strategy to let their audience emerge in the news stories, which is interactive game that can play on smartphones. In 2018, they created a game which depicts a day of an Uber driver and allows the audience to "play" as a passenger.

Meijer and Kormelink (2015) points out that in 2004, participants used the word “reading” mostly refer to their use of printed newspapers. However, ten years later, although reading remains an attentive news practice, many other activities have emerged, such as sharing, liking, recommending, commenting and voting. Hermida et.al (2012) also found that the rising social networks are becoming a significant source of news for Canadians. They point out that social sharing, commenting and recommendation system can benefit news organizations in extending their reach by closely matching the news agenda of Twitter and their legacy platforms.

CONCLUSION

Smartphones are first invented for commercial uses and later become popular items for the public. The wide usage of smartphones brings dramatic changes to news consumption and further influence the news production. Based on the idea of “medium is the message”, four inevitable changes have brought to the news industry: smartphone has become a primary source of getting news; news providers are widely using smartphones for reporting; the line of getting news and producing news is blurred; and news media are competing to attract audience attentions when smartphones penetrated to people’s daily lives.

However, some cultural factors do hinder these changes in countries with weak economic power. These changes only exist in the society with wide usage of smartphones. Also, the rise of social media services, the increase of media literacy and the passion of amateur journalists accelerate these changes. It is hard to judge whether it is technological determinism or cultural determinism because it combines two determinisms, but what matters most is that smartphone, as a communication technology, does bring a revolution to the news industry.

REFERENCE

- Annelies Van Den Belt, Harry Evans, Alex Gubbay, Richard Gutjahr, Abhishek Kumar, Justin Osofsky, Meg Pickard, Martin Raymond and Georey Sands. (2011) *The Economists*. Retrieved from URL.
<http://www.economist.com/sites/default/files/special-reports-pdfs/bulletins-fromthe-future.pdf>
- Chandler, D. (1995). Technological or media determinism.
- Costera Meijer, I., & Groot Kormelink, T. (2015). Checking, sharing, clicking and linking: Changing patterns of news use between 2004 and 2014. *Digital Journalism*, 3(5), 664-679.
- Dimmick, J., Feaster, J. C., & Ramirez Jr, A. (2011). The niches of interpersonal media: Relationships in time and space. *New Media & Society*, 13(8), 1265-1282.
- Freidman, T. (2005). *The world is flat*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 488.
- Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New media & society*, 11(8), 1287-1305.
- Hadland, A. (2015). Risk and journalism in the digital age. *African Journalism Studies*, 36(1), 129-134.
- Hermida, A., Fletcher, F., Korell, D., & Logan, D. (2012). Share, like, recommend: Decoding the social media news consumer. *Journalism Studies*, 13(5-6), 815-824.
- Holcomb, J., Gross, K., & Mitchell, A. (2011). *How mainstream media outlets use Twitter*. Pew Research Journalism Project.
- Kovarik, B. (2015). *Revolutions in communication: Media history from Gutenberg to the digital age*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Molyneux, L. (2017). Mobile news consumption: A habit of snacking. *Digital Journalism*, 1-17.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2017). *Reuters institute digital news report 2017*.
- Poushter, J. (2016). *Smartphone ownership and internet usage continues to climb in emerging economies*. Pew Research Center, 22.
- Taneja, H., Webster, J. G., Malthouse, E. C., & Ksiazek, T. B. (2012). Media consumption across platforms: Identifying user-defined repertoires. *New Media & Society*, 14(6), 951-968.
- Westlund, O. (2015). *News consumption in an age of mobile media: Patterns, people, place, and participation*.