

Chapter 22

Social Media and Free Knowledge:

Case Study – Public Opinion Formation

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ABSTRACT

Mass media (e.g., TV) and social media (e.g., Facebook) have a large utilization nowadays; they are becoming an integral part of our life. This chapter describes the psychological effects of media bias and manipulation, along its impact on public opinion by using “agenda setting” and “prototypes/framing”. It shows how media can artificially create feelings and emotions. It will also explore the relationships between free knowledge and media. Free knowledge has a strong potential to prevent media manipulation, and for people emancipation from media control. The paper suggests using media in a more humanistic way, as a space to create knowledge, where social interaction influences knowledge. We talk of communities where people regularly share and create knowledge. The media do not replace existing processes of building knowledge; rather they provide an additional dynamic environment, which must meet certain criteria for what the social knowledge will be emancipator, and not manipulative.

MASS MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN OUR LIVES

Introduction to Mass Media and Social Media

With social media and mass media we refer basically to communication media, i.e., to the storage, organization, processing and delivering of information or data. There are two kinds of media, the

old media or legacy media and the new media. The old media are traditional means of communication and expression existing before the internet, while the new media are those media appearing after and based on the internet. Among the old media we have broadcast and cable television, radio, movie studios, music studios, newspapers, magazines, books and other print publications. On the other hand, among the new media we have Facebook, blogs, wikis, Tweeter, Skype, email, and many

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other internet based media. *In this chapter, we will use the names: mass media for old media, and social media for new media.*

New media or social media shows properties allowed by the internet, such as on-demand access to content at anytime, anywhere, by using any digital device. It allows interactive feedback and “creative” participation. It includes the real-time generation of news and unregulated content. New media has increased its coverage and impact in the last decades, but it still is far from replacing old media yet. For instance, TV is even now having and strong impact around the world. Similarly, other old media are also quite influential in diverse parts of the world.

Given the fact that old media or mass media are widely known since many years ago, and very concrete, while new media is recent, spreading and complex, presenting a wide diversity of forms to get, process, transmit, and deliver information and data, the following of this chapter will be devoted mainly to new media (it is enough to mention the main cases of old media (TV, etc.)).

The widespread use of information technologies and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the web, is a reality. The Web is based on light-weight web services, and provides browser-for the interaction with the end users. The Web technologies include the Internet enabled Web as the native platform. Internet is the more frequent source of information. The problem of using the Internet is the quality and security of the information. Doubts about the quality of online information are given by the lack of control over their scientific and professional rigor.

The last years the web has shifted towards user-driven technologies such as social networks, video-sharing, etc. These social technologies have enabled a revolution in User Generated Content (UGC) and the publishing of consumer opinion. This is dominating the way we use the internet, and the social media (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) is redefining how the internet works.

Particularly, social networks emerged in recent years as one of the main uses of Internet. Social networks have been growth by the users’ actions. It is currently estimated that 53% of Internet users participate in social networks generally (Smith, 2009; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The social media incorporate features to allow users to produce and share content, to build communities, to discuss about specific topics, to publish opinions, to build relationships, or in general to connect and interact.

The first known use of the term social media occurred in 1997, by the executive of AOL Ted Leons when he commented that the consumers needed “social media” (Smith, 2009; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). During the decade of 2000, a number of social media technologies made their debuts: Facebook, Twitter, Blogger (a blogging platform), Wikipedia, etc.

There is not a clear definition of social media. Kaplan and Haenlein (Braun, 2012; Smith, 2009; Treem & Leonardi, 2012) refer to social media as “Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of UGC”. We can consider social media like a human communication mediated through social software. A social software facilitates the creation of social networks in a digital environment, in order to allow the interaction, the content-sharing and the collaboration. Social media are designed to promote the content generation by the users and to facilitate the sharing and diffusion of information. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has defined three basic requirements for UGC (OECD, 2007) (Braun, 2012):

- The content must be made available, for instance on a social network service accessible to a selected group of people, or on a public website.
- The content creation must involve creative effort. Copying content and publishing it on another website is not UGC.

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