

The Bottom Line

Summary

This section defines and sums up the emerging characteristics of the news ecosystem in the Internet and digital era.

The news ecosystem is undergoing rapid change due to new technology and other factors and as a result, mainstream media is going through a difficult time and its future is uncertain

When the Internet became a free source of news, newspaper circulation started falling as readers and audiences shifted their news consumption online. Advertisers repositioned their advertising to online platforms where audiences are migrating and these dynamics have reduced the advertising revenues in traditional media, while not necessarily seeing a matching increase in online revenues.

The introduction of Web 2.0 in 2004 introduced a platform which enabled many new functions that are now churning out news instantly round the clock. These include blogs, an option which brought a sea change that enabled audiences to create content and publish themselves. As a result, news stories appearing in the media are no longer exclusively written by trained journalists and radio, newspapers and television are no longer the only sources of news. Microblogs like Twitter and social networking sites like YouTube and Facebook and RSS feeds are some of these options

1 Digital Technology and the Internet-the impetus of changes in the media

Digital technology and the internet have changed many processes that existed in the media.

Newsgathering and news dissemination have changed dramatically. The introduction of the Web 2.0 platform created a sea change that enabled users to publish themselves.

1.1 Isoquantic Shift

Although digital communications technology started to appear in the early 1980s¹, the arrival of the Internet in 1994 is seen by researchers and communications scholars as the impetus for most changes in the media (see Castells, 2001) The Internet, which came about as a result of the convergence of the computer and the telephone revolutionized communications, creating what some researchers call an “Isoquantic shift”.

“There is a theory in high technology called the Isoquantic shift which refers to a significant technological advancement that dramatically changes the way people do things and completely re-orientates people’s concepts on how things are done. We’re seeing a new Isoquantic shift taking place this decade that is replacing the old analogue communications we have known-digital compression communication. That’s a very significant factor for all of us, because of the convergence of our respective industries, whether its computers, communications or content”²

The Isoquantic shift in the media, brought about by the Internet changed how news is gathered and how it is disseminated. In terms of gathering news, the Internet made it easy for the media to do background research as most local and international organisations and companies and governments set up websites to provide information which in the pre Internet era would have taken time to access.

The Isoquantic shift also saw the Internet turn into a news dissemination platform which offers newspapers, radio and television space to publish and broadcast, changing age-old traditions. Instead of buying newspapers, or tuning into their radios, audiences can now turn to the Internet for news and have embraced online newspapers in a way that has challenged traditional newspaper publishing and printing. Debates say the same is likely to happen to television, that more and more audiences will be turning to the Internet for news instead of their television sets. That argument is contested and sometimes dismissed by those in the television industry.

1.2 Web 2.0- an enabling platform

Internet features like Web 2.0 which came about in 2004 made it easy for audiences to publish their own sites and blogs, which marked the beginning of DIY or citizen journalism. In theory, the proliferation and easy access to digital consumer technologies like digital cameras, video camcorders and camera-enabled mobile phones, made multimedia publishing possible for anyone willing to capture video and photographs and post them online.

These enabling technologies gave ordinary people the means to do what previously only journalists could do and were the impetus of some of the changes in the media. With no barriers for participation on the Internet, thanks to its end to end architecture, audiences are increasingly creating content and publishing it themselves or contributing it to the media instead of just consuming it, as has almost always been the case. The extent to which such self publishing and content creation will transform the media has been the subject of much debate by media professionals, researchers and communication scholars.

2 New Media versus Old Media- the main changes

In the days of the old media, schedules played a critical part in news delivery, particularly in broadcast news which was the only source of breaking news. The Internet has changed all that; news is now delivered 24/7 on an increasing number of platforms.

2.1 Immediacy, Archival, Retrieval

In today's media, 'immediacy' is the key word; news is instant and easily available round the clock and even yesterday's news is easy to retrieve. The Internet's architecture, primarily search functions and archival facilities gives it retrieval capabilities that make content available for much longer than the day of publication.

With old media, missing the day's newspaper meant that unless you found someone with that day's copy, or bought it directly from the publisher or visited the library, you would have missed the news. With television and radio, if you failed to catch the bulletins, or failed to record it on a cassette tape recorder or on a VHS cassette tape, or other recording devices, there was no other way of listening or watching the missed bulletins.

The new media, essentially the Internet, gives viewers or readers a selection of all the news and leaves it up to them to determine what they want to watch and in what order, and there are no news-anchors or newsreaders, a linear format that has always characterized traditional television news.

Old media, was based on scheduled times, for example the 6pm television or radio news broadcasts or morning or weekly newspapers. News content in the old media was almost always exclusively compiled and packaged by trained in house journalists. With new media, anyone can potentially contribute to the media.²

2.2 New video and news dissemination platforms

As the Internet increasingly takes centre stage as the main tool for research, news production and distribution, journalists, editors and news production staff in the media industry now use the Internet to deliver news in its various formats-audio, text, graphics, and video electronically or via bits and bytes as opposed to atoms, or hard copy (Negroponte, 1995).

The options for watching video news (or video in general) are multiplying as many new 'Online Television Service Providers' emerge. Before the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, television was the only option unless you had a Betamax or VHS player to watch pre-recorded video³

These new options challenge traditional television as time previously spent watching television is now being split watching other devices.³

2.3 Mainstream media no longer the only source of news

Another outcome of the technological changes, particularly in the Internet space is that mainstream media like television, radio and newspapers which used to be the dominant

source of news in the pre Internet era are now competing with newer sources, albeit at a smaller level. Alternative news sources on the Internet like weblogs, RSS feeds, wikis and social networking sites are gaining momentum.

“...Media have become nearly ubiquitous, and journalism again finds itself at a crossroads as the media landscape becomes more fragmented and filled with competition from non-traditional sources”⁴

The key thing is that while these new online forms are not as big or as well resourced as online sites by as traditional media, the proliferation and variety of information they offer is finding some ready audiences. Unlike mainstream media, the content on most of these sites is contributed by audiences or users. The stories range from original reporting of local events and disasters, to commentary on entertainment and news stories appearing in mainstream media elsewhere. According to American new media scholar John Pavlik, technology is reshaping relationships.

‘Technological change is fundamentally reshaping the relationships between and among news organizations, journalists and their many publics, including audiences, competitors, news sources, sponsors and those who seek to regulate or control the press’⁵

3 Citizen journalism phenomenon

With technology enabling consumers to do what only journalists could do, a new phenomenon of journalism is emerging. Citizen journalism, the process of participating and contributing news to the media by audiences comes in various flavours. The one widely looked up to in the early days of the Internet is the one where audiences publish news on their own websites, DIY journalism, if you like. The perception was that having the enabling means to publish websites and contribute content online made citizen journalism easy, possible and attractive to do. The reality however is different.⁶

In communications research, the benefits of citizen journalism are not disputed. Hard news reporting requires an on-the-ground presence and citizen journalism have made many notable contributions to news. As a result, some people say that citizen journalism is a threat to journalism. This is highly contested. Another argument about citizen journalism is that it lowers journalism standards. Again this is disputed

These debates seem to have no winners or losers yet, and increasingly many are realizing that it is very difficult to predict the future of journalism.⁶

4 Will the Internet kill traditional media and television?

Perhaps one of the most important issues coming out of debates about citizen journalism and D.I.Y media is how far the Internet will affect traditional media platforms. Many

commentators agree that the Internet has dramatically changed the media and created many new platforms, new players and new processes. What is disputed is how far the Internet will go and whether it will eclipse traditional media platforms and make other media technologies obsolete or not.⁷

For the effects of the Internet on traditional media, the aptly titled *The State of the News Media 2008*, by Project for Excellence in Journalism offers some insights into the areas most affected by the media.

“In print, the problem is vanishing advertising, particularly classified. Were it not for that one sector, newspapers’ problems would be comparatively modest. In television, where problems with audience are more acute, the industry is being sustained by the fact that still nothing compares to the persuasiveness of television advertising. Online, the problem is that the revenue model is in search, not conventional advertising — and journalism sites are now already lagging behind other Internet sectors financially.”⁸

There is no shortage of commentators who doubt and dispute the assertion that the Internet and new media paradigms are killing the media. Media is not dying, they say and Elaine Zinngrabe the senior vice president for the online division of the Denver Newspaper Agency, which publishes *The Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News* explains how the debates of the future of the media are unfolding.

“Anyone following news about the media might believe that one morning soon we will wake to empty driveways, idle delivery trucks and paper boys’ bikes all locked away in garages. The last newspaper will have been printed. Such is the doom and gloom that now seems the constant story about the future of newspapers.”⁹

Elaine Zinngrabe says that after prosperous centuries, the very foundation of the press--the printing press--has been wiped away .She suggests that a radical restructuring is what the media needs in the face of increasing media choices and defragmentation of audiences.

Other commentators say new media rarely precipitates the death of old media.

“...it appears that the emergence of a new communications technology changes but does not make extinct those advances that came before it. The telegraph and the telephone did not kill the printed word; nor did film, radio, TV, and the Internet. Television did not make radio extinct, but it did cause a major change in the way the medium was used. Likewise, the computer, the Internet, and mobile media will probably not cause any of the traditional media to evaporate, but they will probably change the way we use these “old” media.”¹⁰

Will the Internet defy the notion that new media rarely precipitates the death of old media? Those who see the Internet changing traditional media are by default challenging the notion that new media does not change old media.

The advent of the Internet also created options that deliver video news at home, away from home or on the go on mobile devices. Television has traditionally always been the sole provider of video news. The proliferation of the Internet and its video distribution capability means that time previously spent watching television is now being shared or spent on other devices.

It's hard to determine how much of an effect these new video distribution formats have on traditional media and it's a widely contested issue.¹¹

5 The Internet versus TV debate-lack of objectivity

There are many factors that the television and Internet debates fail to factor in when weighing the two. There seems to be no objectivity and it seems the threat of the Internet, a relatively new technology is either overrated or underrated. Television has existed for 85 years, and the Internet for 15, so it's a relatively new technology. Television is one simple device with a remote control for ease of use and offers a plug 'n play experience. It usually has a visually appealing big screen and can be viewed by a family and usually takes pride of the place in a living room. Free to air channels which offer news do not cost any monthly subscription fee in most countries like New Zealand, Canada and the United States and many more. In many European countries however, there is a licence fee that must be paid annually.¹² The Internet on the other hand requires a computer-a personal computer which limits the number of people who can huddle in front of it. To get a computer screen that's as good as a TV screen is costly, so generally computer screens are small, and the quality of viewing is compromised from the beginning. To be on the Internet requires a good broadband connection and this attracts a monthly subscription fee. Statistically, if we look at a country like New Zealand, population 4.25 million people, 98 per cent of households have got a TV set (which can be viewed by a family) compared with about 800 000 broadband subscribers most of whom have data caps on their broadband plans.

Generally television hardware has been perfected for viewing video and moving images with no hitches, and personal computers generally offer an inferior online video viewing experience compared to television. However there are new technologies like TVs or set top boxes with broadband ethernet ports that enable video playback on a TV. The numbers of these devices are still small and will take years to reach critical mass adoption.

What this means is that some of the comparisons between the internet and television are unbalanced as there are many underlying factors and advantages each one has over the other.

6 Predicting the future in an era of rapid change

The rapid pace of technological development in the Internet space and the changes in communication fields like the media make it difficult to predict the future.

“The Internet has grown in a way distinctly different from any medium before it. As a result, it is difficult to predict how the Net will change mainstream media and to what magnitude. To say that media will undergo a “paradigm shift” might be an understatement.”¹³

This is supported by many scholars including Manuel Castells who in his book *The Internet galaxy: reflections on the Internet, business, and society* says:

“The wonderful thing about technology is that people end up doing with it something different from what was originally intended. It is this serendipity that underlies creativity in society and innovation in business”¹⁴

One way of scanning the technological horizon is to assess the interest being shown by technology manufacturers and service providers, essentially the investors. These technology vendors are currently hard at work perfecting standards on services and technology like IPTV and also coming up with new innovations that aid the media. It's safe to say for example that the TV of the future will rely heavily on the Internet and that online video and television streaming are set to become ubiquitous as a result.

‘More and more consumers will become creators’, according to a blog entry posted by Chad Hurley, CEO and Co-Founder, YouTube¹⁵

So “Is Television Dead?” a research question at www.mobui.com asks. One of the ‘Yes’ answers comes from none other Vint Cerf, Vice president and Chief Internet Evangelist for Google, the man who played a key role in the development of the Internet. What is interesting though is Vint Cerf saying 85 per cent of what television shows is pre recorded, which means that it can be downloaded on the Internet.

“85 percent of all video we watch is pre-recorded, so you can set your system to download it all the time....You're still going to need live television for certain things - like news, sporting events and emergencies - but increasingly it is going to be almost like the iPod, where you download content to look at later”¹⁶

Less than twenty years ago, the Internet was non existent and the media still had distinct demarcations of radio, newspapers and television, each media requiring each own device or platform to access it. The growth and uptake of broadband world wide since then has been phenomenal and this has been an enabling factor that has allowed audiences to access all types of media online instead of accessing it on traditional formats. Looking to the future, based on broadband uptake levels, it's certain that a lot more people will have access to the Internet and in turn will have potentially easy access to media online. So will this increased access and technological revolution kill traditional media? This is a difficult question with no easy answer. However traditional media are still a preference for some people. Newspapers still sell copies, albeit fewer copies, radio still exists and television still exists. Traditional media may appear to be fighting a losing battle but in

the long run the challenge is for the media to adapt and serve their audiences where ever they are.

¹ <http://www.cytechandprofservices.com/vhistory.htm>

² John Sculley speaking at the National Association of Broadcasters Conference, 1993, quoted in *The Internet and the mass media*, (Eds) Lucy Kuñg, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse. Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2008) pp 36

³ See *New Media Dissemination Platforms and IPTV* under Research Articles on home page at www.theopennewsroom.com

⁴ Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The Elements of Journalism* New York: Three Rivers Press

⁵ Pavlik, J. V. (2001), *Journalism and new media*. New York: Columbia University Press p234

⁶ See *Citizen Journalism Phenomenon* under Research Articles on home page at www.theopennewsroom.com

⁷ See *Research Findings in the Exegesis* under Research Articles on home page at www.theopennewsroom.com

⁸ The State of the News Media 2008 Executive Summary, *Project for Excellence in Journalism* <http://www.stateofthemedias.org/2008/>

⁹ Elaine Zinngrabe, Senior Vice President for the Online Division of the Denver Newspaper Agency, which publishes The Denver Post and the Rocky Mountain News. Media matters: veteran journalists weigh in on everything from the threats to diversity to the future of how the news is delivered. (Report). Source: *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* 24.12 (July 26, 2007): p.8 (4).

¹⁰ Dominick, J. R. (c2005.). *The dynamics of mass communication : media in the digital age* New York, McGraw-Hill

¹¹ See *Research Findings in the Exegesis* under Research Articles on home page at www.theopennewsroom.com

¹² <http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/Television-licence>

¹³ Bowman, Shayne., Willis, Chris., *We Media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*, The Media Center at the American Press Institute 2003

¹⁴ Castells, M. (2001). *The Internet galaxy : reflections on the Internet, business and society* New York: Oxford University Press , citing (Jankowski et al., 1999; UNESCO 1999; Croteau and Hoynes, 2000; The Economist, 2000)

¹⁵ <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2008/09/future-of-online-video.html>

¹⁶ http://www.mobui.com/whitepapers/Mobui_Whitepaper_2_2009.pdf