

# SOCIAL SCIENCES

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN INFORMATION SOURCE FOR TRADITIONAL MEDIA: INSIGHTS FROM TELEVISION IN ARMENIA, MALAYSIA AND BOLIVIA

**Mkrtichyan A.**

*PhD (Candidate of Philology),*

*Lecturer at the Department of Journalism, Yerevan State University,  
Republic of Armenia, Yerevan*

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### Abstract

Today social media not only play a dominant role in distributing media content but also influence television decisions regarding content production through their recommendations and metrics. This research explores the implications of these dynamics for the future of TV journalism. This article examines the circulation of information between mass media, social media and television newscasts. The aim is to highlight how traditional media are transforming under the influence of social networks, with case studies from televisions operating in diverse regions of the world, specially Armenia, Bolivia and Malaysia. These three countries have been selected because they represent varying levels of media development, which makes it possible to reveal the influence of social media on television news through comparative analysis across diverse socio-cultural and informational environments.

**Keywords:** media, information, communication, audience, television, coverage, content, social network, TV news, media in Armenia, media in Malaysia, media in Bolivia.

### Social media vs traditional media: Between trust and use

Social media has become a primary news source for many users by personalizing news content. Additionally, it has begun to serve as a critical information source for traditional media, particularly television.

Social media are being used as an information source, including for traditional media. Actually, traditional media offers only one-way communication; the audience accept message through the media, but the media do not get directly feedback. Social media is now mainstream media. It differentiates itself by being interactive – two-way communication. There are people who will favor social media, specifically today's audience but it doesn't mean that traditional media is useless. It is undeniable that social media has changed the world and today people increasingly turn to social media for news. In recent years, the world, including Armenia has witnessed a profound transformation in how information is disseminated and consumed. This shift has been primarily driven by the advent of social media, which now competes with traditional media for the attention of millions across the world.

From X ((formerly Twitter)) and Facebook to Instagram, the social media world has grown. By making live streams, social TV, mobile, the apps turn audience into "active audience". Social media introduce a new approach for TV viewers [1].

The issues related to information circulation in national segments of social networks have currently divided media experts into two groups: those who think that journalism is also the content created and publicized by non-specialists, bloggers and other people. And those who resist the "globalization" of the journalism profession at the expense of non-daily posts by doctors, builders, housewives or retirees.

Today, the Armenian segment of the Facebook social network is characterized by a number of features

(diversity of perceptions and evaluations, together with various information sources, a repository of opinions and reactions not only of ordinary people, but also of public and government persons, information about operational events of public significance sometimes being made public faster than mass media and possibility of wide distribution, etc.), based on which it can be stated that this social network has also expanded its functions in Armenia and due to the fact that it has "own" content, it acts not only as an interpersonal communication channel, but also as an independent media. Over the past few years, there has been an interpenetration of traditional Armenian mass media and social networks, particularly Facebook. If in 2010-2011 Armenian mass media were positioning themselves here and taking their first network steps (trying to attract the widest possible audience), then later they started to respond to Facebook contents, to prepare materials based on them, to simply copy paste them and in other ways [2, p. 4].

Today, journalists themselves use social networks to get information, not to spread it. Accordingly, in Armenia Facebook, Telegram, YouTube serve primarily as a source of information for journalists. This trend indicates the two-way flow of information between the mass media and the social networks.

In recent years, various large and small surveys conducted among media managers and journalists in Armenia prove that through social networks they receive and spread news, receive or spread it, are in contact with the audience, follow the news, find new interviewee and topics. 97 percent consider social networks as a source of public significance, because there is the news of the day, in many cases, exclusive information, the information base is larger, although misinformation is not a small percentage. Moreover, all journalists are at least 1 social network user. Workers in traditional media consider social networks as a tool,

not as a competitor, social networks today already have a dominant role in the circulation of information and competition. And from the point of view of those who confirm the competition between social networks and traditional media, it should be accepted as an objective process. "Information is mainly consumed from websites." Competition is manifested mainly in the speed of information dissemination. On the other hand, traditional media can withstand this competition by "maintaining reliable, weighted information and the qualitative side of journalism". The influence of online media on the development of television is dual, both positive and negative, depending on the behavior of TV company [3, p. 28].

Both social media and traditional media provide the same service, i.e., they are both information channels, and the relationship between social media and traditional media is competitive – social media platforms can harm traditional media as readers increasingly use social media as their main source of news consumption, thereby significantly reducing traditional media viewership. However, the relationship between social media and traditional media could also be complementary [4].

To understand the dynamics between these two media forms, it is necessary to consider social media and traditional media and their usage and consumption in Armenia, highlighting key trends, including. The factors that influence the choice of media:

- News content and consumption,
- Most reliable source of news and information,
- Media and shaping of public opinions,
- Social media and news consumption,
- Paid news services.

Some have decried social media as the “death of journalism,” but this isn’t a new complaint. In fact, the downfall of “traditional journalism” has been a point of contention since the emergence of television first threatened newspaper readership. The truth is that new platforms have forced traditional media to adapt and evolve [5].

Social networks have transitioned from being competitors to become essential partners for TV channels in promoting content to the masses. The most successful TV channels leverage social networks as powerful marketing tools, reaping significant benefits, as reflected in audience metrics. While content remains king, the shift to a post-TV era has been delayed by one critical factor: the quality of content available on social networks. Just as television reshaped a generation of passive listeners into active viewers during the 1950s - 1980s, the rise of social networks has given rise to a generation of media content creator.

#### **Social media as the main component of the future TV**

Social networks have surpassed television as the primary source of information, with television companies themselves transitioning to the World Wide Web to maintain relevance.

In Armenia, the dominant sources of information are two social networks: Facebook and YouTube. Media experts note that Facebook boasts the largest number of subscribers in Armenia, with even the govern-

ment utilizing the platform to engage with and influence society. This shift, according to experts, has cemented social networks as the main source of information, fundamentally reshaping the information market.

Using social media as a news source enables users to engage with content in diverse ways, including:

- Consume news,
- Discover news,
- Share or repost news,
- Post their own photos, videos, or reports of news (i.e., engage in citizen or participatory journalism),
- Comment on news [6].

The spread of news has become increasingly dependent on websites such as blogs, YouTube, X and Facebook. These platforms are reliant on brief and fast content in order to keep the interest of their users, therefore quantity is better than quality. Journalists face more challenges because of all the information that comes through these networks. They need to filter through all so that their work can still be reliable.

With the constant evolution of the internet and the growing need for social media in the workplace, the work of journalists and their practices are also changing. Traditionally, when collecting the public opinion, journalists ask participants questions and participants are aware of what is being asked of them, and by whom, but with the rise of social media, journalists are able to collect public information without social media users knowing or consenting. For example, when journalists quote social media posts, it may be seen as an invasion of privacy since the usernames are sometimes used to identify the individuals being quoted. These practices become questionable to their audiences; it depends on what they believe is suitable social media behaviour. The use of social media as a journalistic source may also be taken out of context and misinterpreted which in turn misrepresents the public. People who are unsure about whether journalists can reliably make claims using social media may question the value and integrity of the journalists' reports. The media and media news source, such as journalists must present information that is trustworthy [7].

In an age where information is constantly at our fingertips, traditional media continue to face the challenges posed by digital media, trying to find new solutions. In today's world, social media and networks are changing the way news is created and distributed. They greatly influence traditional media in several ways, including:

1. Content creation,
2. Information distribution and communication,
3. By becoming a tool for seeking, receiving and accessing information [8].

As a result, social media allows for more variety and pluralism than traditional media, resulting in audiences moving from traditional media to the online realm on a daily basis, specifically starting to search for information on social platforms.

Paul Bradshaw, an independent consultant on online media, expresses himself on the pages of his

blog titled "Online Journalism" about the essence of online journalism in the following words: "Online media operate in their work with two complementary and contradictory factors: speed and quality. New technologies allow news to be disseminated faster than the old means of communication - radio and television. The Internet, unlimited in space and time, its hypertextuality, the ability to link everything together, make it potentially deeper and broader than the previous kings of context and analysis: newspapers and magazines" [9] .

According to M. McLuhan, television has an effect regardless of its content. And social media with its interactivity and dynamic nature is attractive for receiving and communicating news, at the same time, traditional media continues to persistently search for ways to keep its role and importance in high positions in the lives of the audience. That is why traditional media, particularly television, needs to be used and actively uses the opportunities provided by new media.

According to our observations, in the last few years, Facebook has been joined by X, YouTube, Telegram and other social platforms.

Social networks are a source of information of public importance, and not only of a fun and personal nature, as evidenced by the majority of media representatives who deal with information professionally with the following explanations:

- Provide the news of the day,
- Here is exclusive information,
- Most people immediately write about any offense on the social network,
- The issues affecting the public are more diverse here than in traditional media, the information base is larger,
- There is a large mass of users from the most remote villages, and there are different age, social, political and professional groups, etc.

No, they are not a source of public information, because:

- There is a lot of misinformation or partially incorrect information.

Today, the Armenian domain of social networks is flooded with a variety of information, from political news to civil initiatives, cases of human rights violations, consumer rights, criminal chronicles, from election processes to environmental, agricultural, health, educational, sports and cultural news, especially social platforms during emergency situations. are active and in high demand.

If a few years ago it was possible to talk about the competition between social and traditional media in Armenia, today social networks already have a dominant role in the circulation of information and competition as such no longer exists. And from the point of view of those who confirm the competition between social networks and traditional media, it should be accepted as an objective process. The internet is gradually absorbing traditional media. Information is mainly consumed from websites and social networks. Competition is manifested mainly in the speed of information dissemination. On the other hand, the traditional media can withstand this competition "by

keeping reliable, weighted information and the qualitative aspect of journalism". The competition is manifested mainly in the audience's reactions to this or that event, in connection with the audience, in other words, in this or that impact on the audience. It has a positive effect because:

- Is a free platform, and this freedom has its influence on traditional media,
- Gives traditional media the opportunity to present issues in a multifaceted manner,
- More operative in spreading news, and this speed makes traditional media act even faster,
- Is a rich repository of information, sometimes great content is provided to the media by the users themselves.

It has a negative effect because:

- There is a decline in quality, according to one of the journalists, "fast food journalism is developing", fast, sensational and often meaningless information enters the media from social networks,
- Social networks contribute to the circulation of incorrect language, unspecified information in the media, "a random, incompetent user can become a source of news"
- The demand for professional journalism is decreasing,
- It makes journalists lazy, "journalists have gotten used to looking for information", "they fill news sections with Facebook statuses",
- Copyright is violated,
- Getting stuck in social networks, journalists don't even feel how they turn from information spreaders into information consumers,
- There are so many discussions and references on social networks that sometimes the interesting topic becomes beaten and boring for the readers.

The social media content found in the media we studied was presented in three formats: texts, videos and photos. Texts made up the vast majority in the press and in TV programs. In second place are videos. Moreover, the number of social media videos in the press was greater than the number of those used in TV programs. And in the case of the used photos, it is the opposite image. Television programs used social media in the form of photos more than the press. Social media, and in particular social networks, are today an active platform for the circulation of public information in Armenia, where you can find exclusive information. And the journalists themselves admit this.

The perceptions of journalistic circles about the use of Facebook content by the Armenian mass media are diverse. There are opinions that the mass media abuse this issue, print news and other materials without effort, etc. And that is professional degradation. From the point of view of others, you should use every means to have and maintain an audience, including using this opportunity provided by social networks.

Today, a significant portion of Armenian TV news content is sourced from Facebook. This is supplemented by posts on X by various foreign figures, which often address critical geopolitical events, such as those related to our region, the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict, the Russian-Ukrainian war, global economic issues, and epidemics.

Furthermore, press secretaries of certain state bodies have adopted social networks as their primary communication channels, sharing updates and messages directly through these platforms instead of traditional email correspondence.

Traditional journalism is evolving under the influence of social media, which provides new and vital impulses. Today, the public consumes news instantly across multiple platforms. Social media often outpaces traditional outlets in delivering breaking news, as seen during live events, natural disasters, and political announcements. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram enable the public to contribute to and shape the news in real time, reaching audiences faster than traditional media.

Users now curate personalized news feeds by following specific accounts, making it easier to access tailored content but harder for news outlets to reach broader audiences. Headlines and tweets have become critical in driving engagement, as attention spans shrink and demand for concise, digestible content grows. Meanwhile, algorithm-driven content delivery on

Facebook and Instagram adds another challenge for brands and outlets aiming to guarantee audience reach.

Perhaps the biggest effect of social media on traditional media and content is that now everyone feels like they have a voice. Whether through Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat or Medium, social media has provided a public forum for anyone who has an opinion. While this has created an overwhelmingly saturated social atmosphere, this has also led to a genuine wave of voices and influencers on social. The pandemic also contributed to it. The audience moved to social platforms. In these days of pandemic, protests, economic recession and angst among the world's population a recently issued report shows that consumers continue to shift away from traditional media sources for their news and are moving more towards social media and messaging services to find the news.

The influence of social media on public opinion is enormous. Often, not only social media is preferred and becomes the primary source of information dissemination, but vice versa. It becomes a traditional media platform for disseminating information, discussing publications and establishing feedback.

Table 1

**Most popular social networks worldwide [11]**

| N   | Network            | Number of active users (in millions) |
|-----|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Facebook           | 3.070                                |
| 2.  | YouTube            | 2.530                                |
| 3.  | WhatsApp           | 2.000                                |
| 4.  | Instagram          | 2.000                                |
| 5.  | TikTok             | 1.590                                |
| 6.  | WeChat             | 1.380                                |
| 7.  | Facebook Messenger | 947                                  |
| 8.  | Telegram           | 950                                  |
| 9.  | Douyin             | 766                                  |
| 10. | Snapchat           | 850                                  |
| 11. | Kuaishou           | 714                                  |
| 12. | Reddit             | 606                                  |
| 13. | Weibo              | 599                                  |
| 14. | Twitter/X          | 586                                  |
| 15. | QQ                 | 562                                  |

Actually, the social media metrics could explain a certain percentage of the variability in TV ratings [12].

Social media is an integral part of daily internet usage. Market leader Facebook was the first social network to surpass one billion registered accounts and currently boasts approximately 2.9 billion monthly active users, making it the most popular social network worldwide. In June 2023, the top social media apps in the Apple App Store included mobile messaging apps WhatsApp and Telegram Messenger, as well as the ever-popular app version of Facebook. Social media usage is one of the most popular online activities. In 2024, over five billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to over six billion in 2028 [13].

There are two types of visions for the future of journalism. The positive vision of these two involves an idea of developing the already diverse media publicity into something that is more strongly based on dialogue and interaction. Rather than having a passive

group of recipients, media will be greeted by an active audience. In this way, the digital era is changing the traditional concept of the professional identity of reporters. Discussions taking place on social media can at their best promote democracy, enhance the supervision of journalistic work, support multivocality and offer access to information and arenas of discussion, even to those living on the periphery.

According to the negative vision, in the future traditional media will not be democratised, its news production will not spread out, and citizens will not be better informed. The ownership of the media, by contrast, will become concentrated, resources decreased, products standardised and made more entertainment-focused and their quality impaired. Hoping to gain the most clicks, populists and shocking news will replace in-depth and slow analyses. News, and in particular news headlines, will become more sensational. Under commercial pressure and the

concentration of ownership, the autonomy of journalists will decrease.

This is not the first time, however, that the media will have undergone a change. Every time a new form of media becomes popular, it challenges the way the existing media corporations work [14]. Finally, some experts also note that social media is the new television.

#### **Media as social network user: Armenia, Malaysia, Bolivia**

Media, like other parts of the Armenian social network community, uses Facebook the most. There is no mass media operating in Armenia, including regional televisions, which is not represented on any social network, first of all on Facebook. As the media managers point out, mainly because Facebook is actively used by political forces, various public groups, the largest Armenian-language social network audience is here, operative, often exclusive information is generated here. Among the other social networks with the most distribution among the media are Youtube (89%), Telegram (60%), Instagram (44%) and X (38%). The media has also become a TikTok user (17%), as the respondents say, because

- "... on that social network information is digested faster, it is important for the day news gathers a much larger audience" (Past.am),
- "it is the most attractive and developing social network for young people today" (Yerevan.Today) [15, p. 13].

In fact, taking into account the change in the media environment and reality in Armenia, there is a need to think about new and fresh approaches for the activities of traditional media, particularly television, and to form new regulations and mechanisms for managing and confronting new risks against disinformation and fake news [16], which will contribute to the health of the environment, the coexistence of old and new media.

The young and middle-aged population prefers to get their news and other information from online sources. The convenient access to online news, consumers' changing patterns, shift towards digital content has brought the traditional media to find new ways to act and create its impact on the society at a faster pace [17].

According to the Freedom of Speech and Media Consumption survey, the primary source of information for 59% of respondents in Armenia is social media (social networks, blogs, vlogs, podcasts) [18]. Television is in second place, followed by news websites, then radio and print media. Among social networks, Facebook remains the leader, followed by Odnoklassniki, Instagram, Telegram, YouTube and etc.

The marriage between news outlets and social media has become rocky, with platforms favoring polarization and extremism for click-driven engagement. The future of digital news remains uncertain. However, trends like niche newsletters, paid subscriptions, and smaller online communities are emerging as potential alternatives, offering hope for a rebirth of the industry on a human scale [19].

Here are some key ways in which social media has influenced traditional media:

- Speed and Accessibility

- Audience Engagement.
- Diversification of Content.
- Crisis Reporting.
- Monetization Challenges.
- Filter Bubbles and Misinformation.
- Competition for Attention.
- Data and Analytics [20].

Overall, traditional media and social media both have their pros and cons. Based on that, the relationship between them is still a relationship of integration, not a relationship of exclusion or cancellation. Thus, instead of being pitted against one another, traditional and new media outlets can go hand-in-hand in order to reach the widest amount of people at an effective frequency as the more these types of media integrate with each other, the more the negative aspects and disadvantages associated with each type will be overcome. In other words, developing a successful integration, a complementary relationship, and a sustainable sharing processes between the traditional media and the social media outlets in a collaborative, cohesive, and in an ethical manner would enhance their roles and services, provide added values than ever [21].

The impact of social media on television news is undeniable, as journalists increasingly rely on social networks in their daily work. In Malaysia, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok serve as important information sources for TV news channels. However, this reliance underscores the critical need for verification to ensure authenticity and avoid misinformation.

The process of tabayyun (Arabic for verifying and investigating) is essential when handling content from social media. Television journalists must confirm the credibility of sources and visuals before incorporating them into news scripts. For instance, during the 2023 Elmina plane crash in Selangor, viral dashcam footage and videos shared by the public on social media were used by journalists after rigorous fact-checking and validation.

Social networks act as both partners and competitors to television. While they enable public engagement and content sharing, they also challenge TV's role as a premier news source by allowing users to bypass traditional reporting and share unverified visuals [22].

The situation in Bolivia mirrors global trends in the increasing influence of social networks. Now TikTok is the most used social network in Bolivia, followed by Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. Journalists and media organizations in Bolivia frequently incorporate social media content into their reporting, including footage or posts shared by citizens documenting newsworthy events. This shift has significantly impacted journalism practices, as social networks often serve as primary sources for television broadcasts. This is particularly evident when state authorities or political commentators use these platforms to communicate directly with their audiences. Television channels frequently showcase tweets, videos, and user-generated content related to major events such as protests or crimes. In this context, social networks act as both partners and competitors to traditional television. On one

hand, they enhance coverage by providing real-time content; on the other, they compete fiercely for audience attention, contributing to a decline in traditional TV viewership. To adapt, many journalists and media professionals in Bolivia now create content tailored for social media platforms. During protests or periods of civil unrest, individuals often take to social media to share live footage, conduct interviews, and offer commentary, further redefining the boundaries between citizen journalism and traditional media. If significant events are live-streamed or recorded by social media users, television news programs frequently incorporate this material into their broadcasts [23].

Social media has become a significant source of information for television news programs. TV channels increasingly rely on social media for several reasons, including the speed and immediacy with which news is reported and circulated.

This reliance is particularly prominent where TV channels face limitations in covering events on the ground due to restricted human or material resources. While audiences often prefer social media for quick access to news, television continues to hold public trust for its more accuracy and reliability.

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