

# Social and Individual Impacts of Social Media and Its Interactions with Traditional Media

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## Abstract

*Web 2.0 caused a radical change in users' role by bringing them into the center of a production process. Unlike traditional media in which individuals are just a passive consumer of contents, social media enables the users to become a participant and even producer of the contents besides consuming. Having control over the contents and being able to be a part of the production process also provide a cooperation and more interaction between the individuals. Web 2.0's unique structure that encourages participation, democratization and creation in this sense has affected the communication model both in individualistic and social level in various ways. A multi-centered, multi-sourced, flexible, participatory and interactive structure has become available through social media when compared to the hierarchical and single-centered structure of traditional media channels. In this paper, we investigate these social and individual impacts of the social media and the interactions between the social media and the traditional media which mainly results from the new type of media consumer brought about by the social media.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Traditional Media, Web 2.0, User-Generated Content

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years, the information technologies and applications in the field of communication have progressed very rapidly. Today, the Internet has become one of the most important tool that facilitates information sharing and communication. The increasing popularity of the Web as a new communication channel has caused various changes in the use of traditional media as well as in people's daily lives [4]. By the fact that Web 2.0 has begun to acquire a solid place, the usage patterns of the Internet have also begun to change. This development, which is sometimes referred to as a revolution, has narrowed the gap between the parties that produce and receive the message which is seen in traditional media. With Web 2.0 transformation, new forms of content creation and content organization on the Web have begun to emerge. But this transformation is not solely based on technological changes, but more importantly, on a fundamental mental change. Social media services have given users the opportunity to express themselves and become content producers. For the first time in history, users have become able to contribute to the contents of the Web, without any need to have an

advanced technological knowledge. Social media platforms common features are user-participation and openness. In this way, these new services have brought democracy to the Web and have made the traditional distinction between producer and consumer of the content ambiguous. With these new technologies, more and more users are becoming content producers day by day and as a consequence, the content is not just flowing from the producer to the receiver/viewer or from top to bottom as before. By Web 2.0, it has become possible for users to produce information and to distribute this generated information among other users. The main element that makes this approach successful is the structure of Web 2.0 that allows the self-organization of its users. New services support individuals to make their information accessible to everyone and help the development of collective intelligence[7].

## II. SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Web 2.0 transformation has not only changed the position and the role of the individual on the Internet, but also directly affected the social life and forms of communication. By having the chance for expressing themselves much more than before through social media, the individuals have found the opportunity to interact with others as never before, to meet with a wider audience, to share their thoughts, experiences and knowledge as a content producer and active participant. Social media, which is used intensively and has an increasing popularity day after day, affects the ways for accessing to information, the forms of communication, entertainment, self-expression and socialization, identity formation, lifestyles and values of individuals.

Network society changes the relationship between the parties; relationships and connections between individuals, groups and institutions are transforming. In the network society, rather than mass communication, a more individual and interactive media emerges. The new forms of communication cause the formation of several virtual communities that come together around various interests. With the combination of social and media networks, communication becomes more democratic, transparent and accessible to everyone; hence this combination directly affects and changes the society, culture, politics, economics and daily life [16].

One of the sociological characteristics of Web 2.0 applications is that people create a new articulation between individuality and solidarity by

making personal production. Web development has always included community ideals, but the community is often thought as both voluntary and organized cooperation. Common sociability and roles give individuals the feeling that they are part of a community and share a common vision. The success of Web 2.0 services lies in enabling users to find out their motivation by allowing them to express themselves personally in a public environment[1].

The construction of individual and group identity is an element that integrates spontaneously within democratic culture. By sharing personal tastes and lifestyles via digital media, individuals become connected with each other by these experiences and build group identities [15].

The sociological reasons behind this rapid rise in self-digital production may lie in the dynamics of individualization in contemporary societies as the growth of cultural capital, the desire to be single and visible, testing new forms of identity formation, searching for reputation and fame. Being able to publish the personal thoughts, images, comments on public events, the cultural favors appear as a new form of identity construction in individualistic societies [1].

With the emergence of user-generated content with Web 2.0 technology, the distinction between professional and amateur content has begun to blur. Social interactions that develop around the content play a key role in understanding the importance of user-generated content. The ability to vote, comment, criticize and write answers in this new world of media provides the continuation of the success of new media features. A population has now emerged who wants to share and record their experiences and who let their reputation to build through others' evaluations by letting their friends and other community members to make evaluations about their experiences. So the key concepts of social software in Web 2.0's new world are expressed as identity, dialogue, relationship, sharing, reputation and group[3].

Self-organization appears as the most basic form of the collective organization in Web 2.0's relationship structure. One of the most basic features of Web 2.0 services is that the rules and norms are produced by users themselves. When users are obliged to comply with service providers' recommendations, they often criticize the official rules, try to influence service providers in order to propose new rules and adhere to better rules for the community [1].

User-generated content is laying the foundation for an open platform that enriches political and social debate, enhances view diversity, freedom of expression and free movement of information. Transparency changes the approach to content creation. For example, blogs, social networking sites

and similar other platforms can be used to connect with voters, to exchange ideas, to provoke debate, and to exchange information on social and political issues [17].

With the changes based on user-generated content, passive consumption of publications and mass distribution seems to replace with a more interactive and participatory culture. Technological developments have encouraged individuals to tell their own stories, to produce cultural products such as music and video, to transform the environment of information and media content. Users are getting a much higher value from the contents because of content production is more personal and demand based, and they also have much more control over the contents. These platforms, on which more democratic participation is possible, enable users to integrate more easily into the society and culture [17].

Aguiton and Cardon[1] states that the user-generated contents are the first step on the way towards ensuring the coordination between users and offer an opportunity to organize collective activities. For example, the vast majority of bloggers who have been interviewed stated that they spend much more time responding to comments than they had spent editing their posts. Similarly, Wikipedia users stated that they have focused on writing only personal articles at the beginning, but as they become more and more involved in applications they started to acquire new goals. It is stated that, over time, Wikipedia users became more interested in the whole quality of the Wikipedia content, they started to look for opportunities to control community activities, correct errors and help by taking more administrative roles on the site. The authors state that this transformation in users' aims from individual interest to collective interest can also be observed in other relational sites such as Flickr or Youtube where people share user-generated content [1].

Social media has radically changed the forms of identity creation, reaction and communication of individuals and carry them to the new forms. At this point, it is also worth to point out the differences between the dynamics of online and offline worlds. How does the behavior and pattern of an actor who writes his/her thoughts in a less timid attitude, who shares contents as photographs, texts, music, etc., who increasingly takes more time to read other people's writings and reacts to them, in other words who socialize online in a more protected and anonymous environment overlap with his/her behavioral pattern in the offline world? Will online experiences affect offline behavior positively in terms of content creation and socialization over time? Or are the people going to be dragged into a division as gaining online and offline identities? It can be said that a wide variety of dynamics related to this problematic can be seen. For example, while offline acquaintances can come together within an online

network and join a closer and persistence interaction, some online acquaintances can acquire an organization for a specific goal, which provides an offline activity. Examples of such mass transfers from offline to online and from online to offline are just some of the rich types of communication that social media allows. It is understood that both online-offline separation and online-offline interaction at the individual and community level will be subject to a wide variety of researches for many years.

### **III. VARIOUS MEDIA THEORIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

McQuail [9] summarizes various media theories in six main themes. These are “Mass Society”, “Marxism and Political Economy”, “Functionality”, “Social Founding”, “Technological Determinism” and “Information Society”. According to “mass society theory”, society is treated as a whole which has a centralized structure and formed by people. According to this theory, the actors who dominate the media will keep control of the society as well, because the media has a central structure in which knowledge and ideas flow in one direction. People’s identity formation and social tendencies are shaped directly by the media.

The “Marxist political economy approach” argues that it is inevitable that the capitalists who hold the means of production directly or indirectly controls the information transfer process in the media. The danger of monopolization in the media can lead to a biased and controlled transmission of information which has no diversity in a real sense. Moreover, similar rots become even more serious with the development of Internet and information technology. In this context, frequently used social media sites such as MySpace and Youtube are reminded and it is argued that as the number of access increases, a social media tool becomes similar to traditional media tools and this can result in marchandisation of users and content. In addition, communication technology which the new media is dependent on has created a “knowledge economy”. The information technology sector is dominated by the world’s monopolists. Thus, the new media which comes with new technology, carries the worldwide threat of media monopolization [9].

The “functional theories” under the third theme focus on the social and/or individual needs that determine the use of the media. In this context, mass media has functions as acquiring knowledge, transmission of disorganized events and information by harmonizing them, providing cultural continuity, entertainment, political and social mobilization [9].

When the theory of “social founding” comes into question, the basic assumption based on this theory is quite similar to the theory of mass society: The creation of social reality is under the control of the media. In the fifth theme, McLuhan’s theory of

“technological determinism” is examined. According to this, technological developments in the field of media have shaped the perception, experience, behavior and attitudes of individuals and societies. At this point, the information which is provided to the public through the media has no importance anymore. The main thing is the structural characteristics of the “media” that the information is transmitted to. Finally, when it comes to “information society theory”, this approach assumes that the knowledge took the place of industry and the society is increasingly in a rapid flow of information in a reciprocally connected way [9],[5].

At this point, when typical structural characteristics of new media is taken into account, it will be useful to reconsider the issues of traditional media theories. When it is considered in terms of “competence”, it can be said that, different from the past, the central and monopolistic structure of communication tools has been replaced by a broadly participatory and interactive medium.

In the same context, when it is considered in terms of “integration” and “identity”, the centralized media structure in which metanarratives and attitudes including specific ideals, goals and ideologies were transplanted to the public within nation-state borders were fragmented. On the other hand, by providing the opportunity of individual participation, the new media resolves the alienation problem of individuals which emerges as a consequence of modernization. The new media enables alienated and disconnected individuals to reintegrate to the society.

When it is considered in terms of “social change”, as mentioned above, the central and one-way media model which political elites or intellectuals have trained and transformed the society, completed its historical process. For this reason, a planned and regular socio-economic development phenomenon does not seem possible in the context of new media. On the other hand, the social impact of the new media can not be denied. The role of social media in political and social transformations, as seen in “Arab Spring”, is worthy of examination. Social media platforms have been influential in the decline of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. The “April 6th Youth Movement” organized through Facebook in Tunisia, which is the first start of this process, has reached tens of thousands of supports in a very short term. In this process, social media has two main functions that can be expressed as organizing the protests and informing the public about the protests. At the point of sharing the demands of the demonstrators with the world public opinion, Facebook was alleged to be much faster than a well-organized television channel like Al Jazeera [13].

This shows that the new media has a very active role in terms of political participation and

democracy. In this context, the advantages of the new media can be summarized as “possibility of interactive participation instead of one-way information-idea flow”, “coexistence of horizontal (individual) and vertical (opinion leaders/leaders and society) communication”, “low costs of access to information and idea transfer tools both for senders and receivers”.

New technologies are changing communication models. The technical infrastructure and interactivity provided by the Internet has made the simultaneous and mutual communication possible. Therefore, a communication model from a single center to a mass audience leaves its place to a communication model which flows from mass to mass. Web 2.0 technologies constitute the substructure of this new communication model. When compared to the Web 1.0 period, in Web 2.0’s world, users who actively produce contents, interact with each other and come together around similar interests and dynamic web pages come to the forefront instead of the static web pages and instead of the users who were only in a consumer position in the past. This causes a transformation of the old communication model, which has a hierarchical structure and flows from one center to many people, into a symmetrical, flexible, democratic and participatory communication model where the information flows from many to many [2].

In the light of these explanations, it can be said that the structure of the traditional media is fragmented and the central media institutions have left their place to a structure which has numerous interlinked elements. In this process, the mass audience has left their place to a large number of audience islands, which are specialized in and focused on particular subjects, and the area that these islands are formed in is involved in a process in which individual tendencies and preferences are determinative.

What will be the near-term social impacts of the new media phenomenon? According to McQuail [9], it is not possible to produce a deterministic theory in short and medium term about the social effects of this change process that the media is facing. On the other hand, new developments offer richer perspectives when looking from an individual perspective.

As mentioned above, new media’s fragmented structure and being individual preferences more determinative in this new media directs the attentions from “passive audience” approach to “active audience” approach. Indeed, it is seen that the classical mass communication model in which the information flows from a single source to a mass has left its place to a multi-centered, multi-sourced and interactive structure in which the source and the

audience can shift their places from time to time and cooperate from time to time [9].

At this point, it will be appropriate to address the characteristics of the active audience. These characteristics can be summarized under five main themes. Firstly, the active audience is selective, that is to say, he/she chooses in the direction of his/her own taste and preferences rather than accepting the media products without questioning. Secondly, the active audience puts his/her individual interests at the forefront in the consumption of media products, so he/she is utilitarian. Third, active audience does not consume media products unconsciously. Information passes through a cognitive filter. The fourth characteristic is that the active audience is resistant to interference. Finally, active audiences exhibit participant characteristics [9].

#### **IV. INTERACTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA WITH TRADITIONAL MEDIA**

Dimmick et al. [4], focuses on the gratification opportunities that communication channels offer to individuals. The gratification opportunities that focus on the characteristics of a communication medium more often are expressed as the perceived content, time and space characteristics of a communication medium. According to this, the more content types and usage freedom the communication medium offers to the receiver, the more gratification opportunity will be served. The Internet provides a much wider range of content and much more time flexibility in this sense. For example, traditional media tools, such as television or newspaper, have a limited content and a solid timeline that requires the user to comply. On the contrary, the new media offers to individuals much more content alternatives and control over the contents [4].

New formats of content production have led to a revolution in all media types. This also causes a change in users' attitudes as they can now be able to let everyone to access the content they produce. Every user on the Internet can create new blogs, generate podcasts, edit content on wikis, etc. Wiki services such as Wikinews and blogs have become an alternative to traditional news and comment providers. Wikipedia has begun to challenge traditional knowledge repositories. Applications such as wikis, blogs, podcasts can respond to current events and developments much more quickly than traditional infrastructures. In contrast, a traditional news service has to control the event and pass it through an editorial process before publishing it. Contents on Wikipedia can be updated only in a few minutes after new information is available. A classical encyclopedia, however, requires a period of at least one year of writing work to include such up-to-date information. Most of the community-based service on the Web is reversing the traditional

broadcasting/publishing period. In traditional publishing, a panel of editors selects a group of stories from a wide variety of information produced every day, and the number of stories is usually determined by the volume of the journal, the duration of the television or radio program. On the contrary, community-based news providers are able to make every piece of news accessible. All these new types of media make it possible to present alternative perspectives and views that are not appropriate for traditional media. In addition, news on topics that only consumers are interested in can be delivered with filtering techniques [7].

In their research about impacts of social media on print media, Rajendran and Thesinghraj [11] state that easy access to information, interactive nature of social media and on-demand availability of news are the primary reasons for younger people to favor the new media. They also mention that the rapidly changing consumer patterns and a corresponding shift towards digital content have brought the new media to create its impact on the society at a faster pace.

In their research on blog users, Kaye and Johnson [6] stated that the vast majority of users find blogs more reliable than traditional media and especially than traditional journalism because of blogs have more independent, analytical and more personal characteristics. According to this, users view blogs as a new and better form of journalism compared to mainstream media. It is stated that an important reason for this is that blogs have deeper and more subtle analyzes than the mainstream media. Another reason is that blogs offer a more relaxed discussion environment in which traditional media can act more timid. Blogs also contain a variety of stories from around the world that traditional media can ignore. Bloggers and blog readers point out that blogs provides a convenient environment for subtle discussions about various events that have stayed out of traditional media's sight and for pointing out to errors by checking traditional media's news [6].

Kolbitsch and Maurer [7] point out that users are becoming more independent through the tools and services available to them than traditional information providers. Authors emphasized that apart from providing a more democratic environment and enabling user participation, Web 2.0's community-based services will bring new opportunities. Many collaborative services will develop in the future as professionals and non-professionals want to make their content accessible. The authors stated that, in the future, a much smaller percentage of information will be written by professional editors and distributed by media companies; Web 2.0 platforms may become the actual content producing media [7].

Social media platforms differ from traditional media by allowing users to create and

contribute the contents. It also removes the time and content limitations defined by traditional media. Social media allows the consumer to become a producer and the producer to be a consumer at the same time. Unlike traditional media, a social media user can become a contributor to the contents or a creator of the contents besides being an audience. Social media platforms, therefore, have changed the role of individuals when compared to traditional media by offering them the opportunity to have three roles as being an audience, a participant and a producer. Moreover, the individuals gain the ability to play all of these roles at the same time or at different times.

Everyone can become a producer in social media, but the majority of these people consider themselves as a participant in a community rather than a producer. Content in social media has its own audience as it is in traditional media, but the biggest difference is that people enjoy sharing the content they produce or sometimes copy from others. The content can be created entirely by the users themselves or copied from other sites [8]. Social media enables the contents to democratize and change the roles people play in the process of accessing and spreading the information. By providing a format based on dialogue which is established in users' social channels, social media enabled the broadcasting mechanism transform into a "many to many" model. Today, individuals have had the opportunity to publish their own thoughts and perspectives through social media and experience it on a global scale. Social media encourages individuals to become new influencers [14].

Traditional media appeals to masses and does not take individual characteristics into account. More specifically, traditional media broadcast by taking into consideration the common characteristics of a particular target group and the broadcast process flows from one source to many receivers. Broadcasts/publishings need to be reached by as many people as possible and ratings are so important. Social media, on the other hand, offers a more individualized but participatory and multi-centered media environment. Since the audience can also be a content publisher at the same time, the individual has the ability to produce and publish content, even if it is viewed by a few people. Through social media, individuals, perhaps for the first time, have been able to produce and share the contents so easily and without commercial expectation. On the other hand, through social media's interactive structure, users have taken the opportunity to interact with each other and with the contents that may not be possible as in traditional media channels. Instead of a source-to-receiver communication process and limited feedback, a multi-directional communication and feedback cycle has become possible. In this sense, social media offers a much more free, flexible,

participatory and interactive communication environment for users.

On the other hand, it wouldn't be right to say that social media platforms completely exclude traditional media and provide a completely independent environment from traditional media. It is more accurate to mention the existence of an environment that also integrates traditional media. See also [10]. Social media has made possible for users to produce content by themselves, but not all content is produced solely by users. Social media platforms are also nourished from the contents which are broadcasted/published in traditional media. Various types of contents that are broadcasted/published on traditional media channels such as television, newspapers and radio can be shared on social media platforms and users are able to access these contents via social media without depending on the time line of the traditional media. For example, through content sharing sites, any content (TV programs, series, videoclips, presentations, news, text, music, etc.) published in the traditional media constitutes a specific part of the content of the social media. Users can follow these contents through social media and they can participate in various discussions and make comments about these contents. Therefore, the contents provided by the traditional media continues to provide materials for social media.

Another factor that needs to be mentioned here is that the traditional media is starting to nourish from social media as well. It is therefore possible to say that the traditional media is also in an integration with social media platforms. Today, most of the mass communication channels seem to use social media as an additional tool. For example, in many news programs, TV shows or radio broadcasts, the participation of the audiences to those programs are provided through related Facebook, Twitter, Instagram accounts. It is also seen that some of the contents in the social media can be the subject of even the main news bulletins. Many broadcasters use social media platforms to reach their audiences and attract them to their various events or competitions. For traditional media channels, the audience's thoughts, comments, discussions or questions in social media about their programs has become very important data in the context of evaluating themselves and their target audience. Therefore social media offers a valuable platform for traditional media in the sense of being a feedback source.

Social media platforms offer the opportunity to discuss the agenda topics in a more flexible way that traditional media can not handle. Traditional media can have some limitations such as the discussions of particular topics by particular people. By removing that kind of borders of traditional media, social media allows every people to

incorporate intodiscussions, let everyone to express their opinions, it even allows actors in traditional media to express themselves more open.

Social media also makes it easier for individuals to reach larger audiences. Normally, it is not easy for an ordinary individual to be able to find a place for him/herself in traditional media channels, but social media offers the opportunity for any people to reach lots of people very easily and express themselves on a larger scale. It is now possible to see that many people nowadays have become well-known because of social media. For example, some blog writers can reach a large number of readers over time and find a chance to be followed by a wide audience. It is now possible to see some bloggers who have achieved such awareness, publish their blog articles and also transfer themselves in various traditional media channels. Likewise, many musicians who are struggling to announce their voice under normal conditions can be able to convey their songs to masses via social media which can bring them to an awareness not only in social media, but also in traditional media. Sharing their songs on the social media makes it possible for many musicians to gain the appreciation of many users, take the attention of music producers and achieve a national or worldwide awareness. In addition to this, many amateurs who have the opportunity to show their creativity by sharing short films, funny videos, clips etc. with users through content sharing sites such as Youtube can also be discovered by this way and can exist in environments where they can display their talents more professionally.

Salman et al. [12] argue that the presence of the Internet will not replace the newspaper. They believe that the layout of newspapers may change, but the content will be still in the form of news. They observe that there is a drop of circulation of newspapers since the younger generation prefers the new media but they believe that the new media and the traditional media will continue to coexist and reinforce each other.

## V. CONCLUSION

Taking all these points into consideration, it can be said that social media and traditional media can not be considered as isolated sectors. Although social media is an alternative media that has offered a platform of expression, flexibility and interactivity that is not possible in traditional media, it is important to consider these two media sectors as acting in an integrated manner, not completely isolated from each other, but rather nourishing and even in need of each other. The catalyst of this process is the new self-reliant consumer type created by the social media.

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