Consequences Of Digitalisation Of Journalism

Twenty years of social media and various other advancements in technology has meant that anyone with an internet connection can essentially become a journalist. Unfortunately, this has caused the digital world to become flooded with information. Trust and credibility have been tainted by the excessive amounts of news, fake and otherwise, that the audience is having to trawl through on a daily basis. However, a new era is emerging of algorithm-based consumption and online content becoming a service.

Digitization of journalism is transitioning from being detrimental and disruptive to traditional media, to a mutually beneficial relationship between organization and consumer. Algorithmic personalization, machine learning and predictive analytics are assisting media organizations in understanding user behavior and curate news to optimize engagement. This means that they can target their audience and build a long-lasting relationship between themselves and the reader.

Over 90% of the data that is currently available online, has been created since 2014. The sheer amount of information is overwhelming, but algorithms and machine-learning provide a way to search, sort and filter. Therefore, these programs provide a plethora of benefits to both the audience and the producers. They can assist journalists in knowing and identifying the important and most popular stories.

However, there are also some detriments of journalists and media organizations relying on social media platforms and their algorithms. One of which is when the platform decides to change the algorithm/s. This impact is best exemplified by Facebooks algorithm change in January of 2018 that began to prioritize ‘meaningful content’ on user’s newsfeeds. This meant that posts from friends and family took precedent over news, videos and other posts from brands and media organizations which resulted in a decline of engagement.

The emerging era of digital journalism also includes subscription-based content consumption, or SaaS (stories/software as a service). The notion of subscription has existed for many decades before now with services such as Foxtel, newspapers and magazines. However, it seems that consumers are prepared to pay for digital/online content. Netflix has 151 million paid subscribers and Spotify has 113 million so it seems only natural that digital journalism should follow suit.

In the past, journalism had been predominantly paid for through advertising. While this is still the case with online advertising, the new system of having the readers pay for the content ensures that the publisher will listen to what the audience wants and remain loyal to their specific demographic rather than pandering to CPM’s. The organizations implementing this style of digital journalism can rely on revenue from their subscribers (at least for digital production) and therefore produce quality journalism, build trust and maintain a sense of community in the same way that existed in previous decades with regular newspaper buyers.

The Guardian is a prime example of success with this approach. After three years of substantial financial loss, the organization managed to break even in the 2018-19 financial year. Total

revenue has made a 3% increase while their competitors continue to experience significant losses. Data has shown that 655, 000 people support them on a monthly basis and a further 300, 000 people had unique contributions in a 12-month period. Majority of their content does not exist inside this paywall but topics like Cambridge Analytica and the Paradise Papers are subsidized by readers. Also, within the last 3 years the per-month page views soared from 790 million to 1.35 billion, which could arguably be attributed to the loyalty and trust gained through a subscription-based system.

“In times of extraordinary political and economic upheaval the need for quality, independent reporting and commentary has never been greater. Guardian journalism is flourishing – holding the powerful to account and exploring new ideas,” said the chief editor of The Guardian, Katharine Viner.

In terms of the future that this provides for journalism and the next generation of journalists, it is no doubt an exciting time. The idea that the reader will dictate the content rather than advertisers will likely have an incredibly positive impact on quality and ease the pressure to churn out quantity. This coupled with the social media algorithms, have and will continue to increase engagement and therefore boost profits. After many years of journalism falling into a pattern of loss it finally seems that a positive change is a foot.